the weekly Standard

JUNE 26, 2006 • $3.95

BUSH'S IRAQ OPPORTUNITY
FREDERICK W. KAGAN

THE LAS VEGAS DEMOCRATS

Betting on the bloggers
MATTHEW CONTINETTI

Riding with the Kossacks
MATT LABASH

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Cue Violins

Poor Kira Peikoff. According to the June 16 *Washington Post*, the 21-year-old NYU student was thrilled to land a summer internship at the D.C. bureau of a California newspaper. But like many others, she's frustrated by Washington's cost of living. Her 7-by-10 foot bedroom costs $1,250 a month, paid upfront for three months. Her salary, $1,640 a month before taxes, barely covers this.

A tear-jerking story. That is, until you read the fine print. Her bedroom may be 70 square feet, but it's part of a larger apartment she shares with roommates. Oh, and "her father, a retired professor, wrote the rent check."

There's no denying Washington internships can impose financial hardships, but by our calculations, Kira is not one of the victims. She should make about $5,000 for the summer. After taxes, that should leave $300 a week or so in pin money—more than enough for a premium beer after work every day.

Not only did the *Post* fail to find a plausible internship poster child, though, they left out the best fact about her father: He's Leonard Peikoff, the foremost academic authority on that libertarian superwoman and apostle of selfishness, Ayn Rand. In one of his many books explicating and defending Rand's philosophy of objectivism, the elder Peikoff delivers what might even be read as a homily to interns:

Kira Peikoff works in the **Washington** bureau of a California newspaper. She earns, before taxes, **$1,640** a month. She pays **$1,250** a month for a **70-square-foot room** in an apartment. She is not alone. She is one of the area's **15,000** to **20,000 summer interns**.

Underpaid and Barely Housed

By Michael Alison Chandler
Washington Post Staff Writer

gamble of the summer. Some interns come with fingers crossed and a hotel reservation or the

absorb every last cent of their student loans. Local universities ease the crunch by

> A man may be disappointed by others. Rightly or wrongly, he may be unable to persuade them to agree with his ideas or to satisfy his desires. But disappointment does not attack his body or negate his mind; it is not an indication that he has been coerced. A man cannot properly say: "Since no one will pay me a larger salary, my boss *forces* me to take this job at five thousand dollars per year." No employer is obliged to confer wealth or jobs on this individual; no one owes him a living.

Objectivism obviously isn't what it used to be. ♦

True Story or False?

A *Washington Post* headline June 7 told of a sharp conflict on Capitol Hill between a powerful congressional committee and a government witness: "Silence Angers Judiciary Panel; Justice Official Mum on Possible Prosecution of Journalists."

What followed was an article recounting how Arlen Specter and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee took turns lambasting a Justice Department official for "refusing" to reveal whether the Bush administration had ever contemplated bringing charges against journalists for publishing classified government secrets.

The senators, we learned, "bristled" further when the official, Matthew W. Friedrich, the principal deputy attorney general in the Justice Department's criminal division, refused to answer questions about the FBI's recent attempts to gain access to an archive of the papers of the late columnist Jack Anderson.

Iowa's Charles Grassley acidly complained that the refusal to respond to questions signaled a lack of "any respect for this committee whatsoever." Appearing especially vociferous in the story told by the *Post* was Patrick Leahy of Vermont, who told Friedrich: "You're basically taking what would be called a testifying Fifth Amendment. You should be ashamed of yourself."

A transcript of the hearing reveals that all these words were spoken and the *Post* recorded every one of them accurately. But the *Post* story is nonetheless deceptive from beginning to end.

Here is what actually happened at the hearing, but which the *Post* neglected to tell readers. Friedrich did indeed decline to answer many of the questions put to him. But he put forward excellent reasons for his silence, which the *Post* chose not to fully explain.

The unanswered questions all pertained to ongoing investigations or cases proceeding to trial. As Friedrich recounted to the senators, in advance of coming to Capitol Hill the Justice Department had informed the committee staff that, in line with longstanding policy, he would be unable to comment on specific cases. The senators thus knew in advance the limits under which Friedrich would be operating.

The senatorial display of fury at the allegedly recalcitrant government witness was thus nothing more than a well choreographed ambush. And it worked.

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The senators pounded away until they got the desired result—which was not enlightenment about the various cases under dispute, but headlines in newspapers like the *Post*, reporting that the Justice Department is stonewalling and that the Senate is bravely taking it to task.

Perhaps because it made the Bush administration look bad, perhaps because its reporter, Walter Pincus, was feeling lazy, perhaps for reasons that cannot be readily discerned, the *Washington Post* was an eager and willing participant in this charade. So were quite a few other newspapers across the country that published similar stories.

All told, it is no doubt a trifling incident. But is it an accident, in light of what it reveals, that Congress and the mainstream media are two institutions increasingly in disrepute? ♦

Ex-Reaganites

Easy-to-impress *Time* magazine blogger Andrew Sullivan was enthusiastically promoting an op-ed last week by a "Reaganite conservative" named S.J. Masty whose "analysis of our mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan" seemed "very persuasive" to Sullivan. Masty argues that "by the standards of Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, our neoconservatives are not conservative, they are neosoviet." Why? Well, Bush and Blair "sound like Leonid Brezhnev," and America is now the "cruel superpower willing to torture, kidnap, slaughter and invade in order to install an ideologically driven, one-size-fits-all system claiming historical inevitability." (Under Brezhnev, of course, the "system" was Communist tyranny; under Bush and Blair it's democracy. Details, details.)

Sullivan has apparently yet to learn that the woods are full of former "Reaganites." Some are savory and some are poisonous. Masty is one of the latter and is an odd one to be sitting in judgment on the progress of the Afghan war, in particular, as he holds the rare distinction of having once been an apologist for the Taliban.

This was not naiveté on his part, either, as Masty, to his credit, did years of relief work in Kabul at a time when most Reaganites had washed their hands of the civil war there. But he made the monumental misjudgment of sizing up the Taliban as less unsavory than other Afghans. As he reported in the *Washington Times* in 1996, "Afghanistan's Islamist Taliban rebels swiftly overran Kabul and now surge north from the capital with unexpected speed. In their wake, they impose a new religious severity. Most observers find all this surprising and sinister—but it may be Afghanistan's best break in many years." We'll look elsewhere for analysis, thanks very much. ♦

What Business Did They Think They Were In?

A June 14 headline at *Ledger-Enquirer.com*, website of the Columbus, Ga., paper of the same name: "Birmingham abortion clinic surrenders license after baby's death." ♦

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Casual

Gerry's Kids

As English parents of five young girls who've lived almost their entire lives in these United States, my wife and I have spent much of the last decade checking off the rites of passage on their journey towards full immersion in American life.

As much as we love this country and admire what it stands for, it has been jarring at times to watch our little English roses grow steadily into proud flora of a distinctly American species. Parenthood is a wrenching business at the best of times. But when your children are foreigners, too, there can be a painful sense of estrangement.

We've gulped as little right hands have shot to the breast during the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner" at sporting events. We've sat politely while our English pronunciation was corrected and occasionally mocked. We've learned, by trial and error, to refer to them collectively not as "Children," but as "You Guys."

We've looked on in pride and wonder as they've eagerly waded into the cultural singularities of this country: the repeated graduations—I've attended six already, and not one of the girls is out of elementary school—the great seasonal holidays, from Halloween and Thanksgiving, through Presidents' Day, to the Fourth of July when, decked out in their red, white, and blue, they guilelessly celebrate the greatest defeat in English history.

But next week we'll be crossing yet another Rubicon on their route out of our little English home. The Big Three—Kitty, 11, Claudia, 9, and Eliza, 7—will head off for their first ever trip to sleep-away camp.

As a child happily bombarded with American popular culture, I was fascinated by this staple of the national experience. Tableaux of kids singing around the campfire collided in my mind with the lyrics of Allan Sherman's parody "Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh," to produce a confused image somewhere between a never-ending outdoor birthday party and an especially austere prisoner-of-war camp.

My girls have done plenty of day camps before. They've come away skilled in tennis and music and modeling animals with left-over household objects. But now we stand on the brink of their biggest leap yet into this country's irresistible culture, and we are, like all parents at this moment, distinctly nervous.

Darren Gygi

Nervous, first of all, about the simple practicalities of handing our precious progeny over to somebody else's full-time care. What on earth will Eliza do if she loses her irreplaceable teddy? Will Claudia's insistence on demonstrating to those around her a flawless, alphabetical-order command of all 50 state capitals prove too much for even the most patient counselor? Will preteen Kitty simply find the whole swimming and boating and fishing and singing thing just too far beneath her advanced years?

More nervous, of course, about the very idea of our children being two weeks away from the comforting rituals of home and doting parents, not to mention two younger sisters who will wonder where all the noise and energy have gone.

I dread the goodbyes next Sunday. I've heard the horror stories of children desperately grabbing on to rearview mirrors as parents' cars pull mournfully out of the parking lot. What if they simply can't take the homesickness? What deep psychological scars might this abandonment of helpless children leave? Did Abu Musab al Zarqawi's parents send him to sleep-away camp?

And yet I know already that, as we return to our three-fifths empty house that night, the gnawing anxiety in our minds will be a different one. What if they really, really like it?

I'm terrified that they won't miss Sally and me at all. That they won't really want to leave camp and come home. That this first giant step into the vast intimidating world beyond our doors will be remembered by them as a liberation, not an exile.

Secretly, disgracefully, I want that tearful telephone call halfway through the first week that begs me to come and collect them. I want to be able to rush off in the middle of the night on a mercy mission to retrieve them and in an instant be transformed into the hero-father I never could be otherwise.

There's no cure for this, I know. And I know too that this episode will be only the first intimation of the ultimate tragedy of parenthood; that sooner rather than later, they're gone and you're history.

So as I kiss them a tearful farewell next weekend and watch them run off to start the first phase of their independence, I'll take some comfort in the words of C. Day Lewis, who captured the pathos of the moment when his son ventured off the same way for the first time:

> I have had worse partings, but none that so
> Gnaws at my mind still
> Perhaps it is roughly
> Saying what God alone could perfectly show—
> How selfhood begins with a walking away,
> And love is proved in the letting go.

Gerard Baker

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Bomber Blessings

Regarding William Doino's "Pius the Good" (June 12): I was a flight officer and bombardier with the 12th Air Force in Italy during World War II. In early 1945, my crew and I were given leave to fly our B-25 bomber to Rome for five days of rest and relaxation. We landed in Rome and ended up visiting the Vatican, where a cardinal greeted us and told us that Pope Pius XII would bless us if we were interested. Three of my crew were Catholics, and they were excited at the idea of seeing the pope. Besides, we would be returning to combat, and the guys felt that we could use all the blessings the pope might offer.

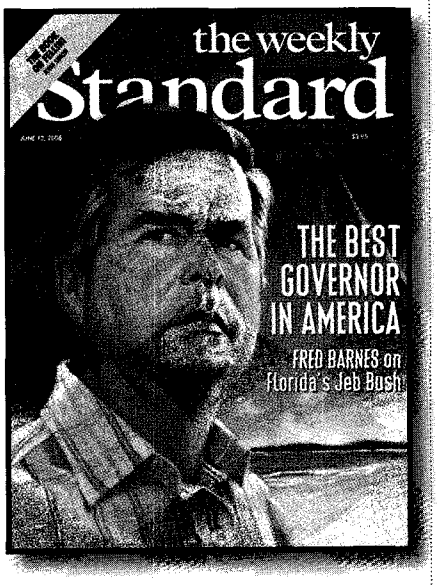
We were ushered in to see Pius XII. He was a much smaller man than I had envisioned, and very kindly looking. Five men in my crew stepped forward to be blessed. I held back, and Pope Pius asked me in broken English why I didn't step forward so he could bless me with the others. I replied that I was a Jew. The pope smiled and said that didn't matter at all—he wanted to bless me, too. Whereupon I stepped forward, thanked the pope, and was duly blessed. A few days later we were flying combat again. My crew got a big kick out of the whole incident. They told other bomber crews, "We're safe. We've got the only Jew in the Air Force who was blessed by the pope." Did the pope's blessing work? Hey, I'm still here, aren't I?

Richard L. Russell
La Jolla, Calif.

Young Democracy

Stanley Kurtz attempts to buttress his claim that polygamy promotes totalitarian rule by referring to the roles Brigham Young performed as territorial governor, city planner, business administrator, and head of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ("Polygamy Versus Democracy," June 5). Kurtz fails to note that Young safely led thousands of people from Illinois across the Great Plains in brutal weather to find refuge in the Salt Lake Valley. Governor Young was a man with good decision-making ability, and the people followed a man with a plan, which does not make him a tyrant.

James A. Marples
Longview, Tex.



Hitting the Bar

Edward Whelan's "Lowering the Bar" (June 12) lucidly illustrates the American Bar Association's liberal bias in evaluating federal judicial nominees. Whelan incorrectly assumes, though, that there are ABA members who would act fairly if appointed to serve on the judicial standards committee. The ABA is so leftist that many politically aware moderates and conservatives do not belong to the group. My law firm is typical: All our lawyers quit the ABA years ago, or never joined at all. Even if the ABA has a few unbiased members, the powers that be certainly would not countenance their involvement in the evaluation of federal judicial nominees.

Philip M. Van Hoy
Charlotte, N.C.

Safety Announcement

Joseph Epstein should be ashamed of himself for not wearing a helmet when he is bicycling ("Spandexless," June 12). He might be riding a unicycle around heaven sooner rather than later. A helmet is not a guarantee that there will be no head injury when falling while bicycling, but no helmet is an open invitation for, at the least, a nasty bump. The "smack" of the helmet on the pavement after a fall is greatly to be preferred to the silence after the "thunk" of the human head.

M.E. Harrington
Vista, Calif.

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going beyond

Is the fuel of tomorrow growing all around us?

The transportation challenge There are some who predict that, by 2050, more than two billion vehicles will be traveling the world's roads, about twice the number of vehicles in use today. As a result, global demand for transportation fuels is likely to rise dramatically, which may have an adverse impact on local air quality and the global climate. So how do we keep the world's citizens and economies moving, while reducing the environmental impact?

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Biofuels of the future While ethanol-blended fuels will continue to play an important role in meeting America's transport fuel needs, BP is also looking at ways of using non-food crops that can be grown specifically for fuel, such as fast-growing willow, poplar and certain grasses. In addition, we are investing in the development of a new generation of advanced biofuels. These fuels may be able to further reduce emissions and provide better performance than the biofuels available today. We're involved in research projects that are seeking ways to convert other forms of "biomass" into fuel, such as waste products from agricultural or forestry activities. We hope technological advances will allow these sorts of fuels to play a larger role in the U.S. transportation fuel supply in the future.

By actively supporting the availability of existing biofuels and applying technology to identify alternative fuels of the future, BP believes we can help meet the needs of consumers, protect the environment and contribute to America's energy security and freedom of choice.

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the weekly Standard

Seize the Day

The death of Zarqawi and the completion of the new Iraqi government have created a moment of opportunity for President Bush in Iraq. If the United States acts quickly to take control of lawless areas, improves security throughout the country, and wins a series of tangible victories, it might break the back of the insurgency. If we return to "business as usual" and the counterproductive Washington obsession with troop withdrawals, the moment will be lost. In fact, the quickest and only path to responsible troop withdrawals is visible progress toward victory over the insurgency and security in Iraq.

Insurgencies end when the population and the insurgents believe the government will triumph. People do not flock to losing causes. The U.S. failure to convince the Iraqi people—especially the Sunni Arabs—that the insurgency will lose has been destabilizing Iraq for the past three years. Many Sunni Arabs doubt the ultimate victory of the current government. Others see violence as a lever to use in a political process they feel is stacked against them. The political progress in Iraq so far is impressive and important. But it will not suffice to end the violence. And it will not continue for long if victory remains uncertain.

Establishing the inevitability of victory is important in ending any insurgency. It is more urgent in the current conflict because of the increasing impatience of the Shiites. Fear and resentment of the Sunni Arab insurgency is one of the main ingredients fueling the rise of Shiite militias and of Shiite reprisal attacks on Sunni Arabs. Both the militias and Shiite attacks and atrocities will continue to grow as long as it appears that the Sunni Arab insurgency is out of control. It is as important, therefore, to convince the Shiites that the Iraqi government's victory is assured as it is to show the Sunni Arabs that the insurgents' defeat is certain.

Saying all this is easier than doing it, of course, and the Bush administration and the Iraqi government have been trying in their own ways to accomplish this goal. The Bush administration has consistently argued that the growth of the Iraqi Security Forces and various rebuilding projects would convince Iraqis to side with their new government. The trouble is that although progress in these areas is a sign of victory for the Iraqi government, continued violence is seen as a victory for the insurgents. When both sides can claim successes in an insurgency, it is really the government that loses.

There is only one thing the administration and the Iraqi government can do that generates both a sense of their victory and an obvious defeat for the insurgency: clear, hold, and rebuild cities and towns wracked by violence and lawlessness, as the president declared we would do last fall. When Iraqi and American troops clear a town in which the insurgents have been operating freely, we know we've won, the Iraqi people know we've won, and the insurgents know we've won. This is the way to create a sense of victory that everyone understands.

The other virtue of clear-and-hold operations is that they bring security. Without security, further political and economic progress is extremely difficult. And the ultimate goal of reconciling Iraq's sects, ethnicities, and tribes will be much easier once the population is secured. Insurgents take advantage of the absence of coalition and effective Iraqi military and police units to assassinate key officials seen as collaborators, intimidate or punish anyone who might provide information about the rebels to the coalition, and recruit supporters from disaffected and terrorized young men. Those young men are frequently unemployed, moreover, because it is nearly impossible to have a functioning local economy in such lawless conditions. Even the nonmilitary elements of counterinsurgency strategy that the Bush administration has rightly been emphasizing require security to succeed. Yet clear-and-hold is not actually the primary objective of U.S. forces in Iraq today. American commanders instead claim to be focused on "handing over battlespace" to newly trained Iraqi troops. Like the body counts of the Vietnam war, the percentage of "battlespace handover" has become the statistical proxy for success in this war.

That must change. With the Iraqi government now complete and the Iraqi Security Forces growing more rapidly than anyone had a right to expect, there is no more urgent task for the coalition in Iraq today than establishing security throughout the country. This is not merely part of a defensive operation to control the spreading violence. Now is the time for a surge in military operations to clear and hold contested areas in Iraq that can offer the prospect of convincing large numbers of Iraqis that the government will win and the insurgents will lose. This is the best hope for breaking the insurgency rapidly, strengthening the new Iraqi state, and achieving victory.

—Frederick W. Kagan, for the Editors

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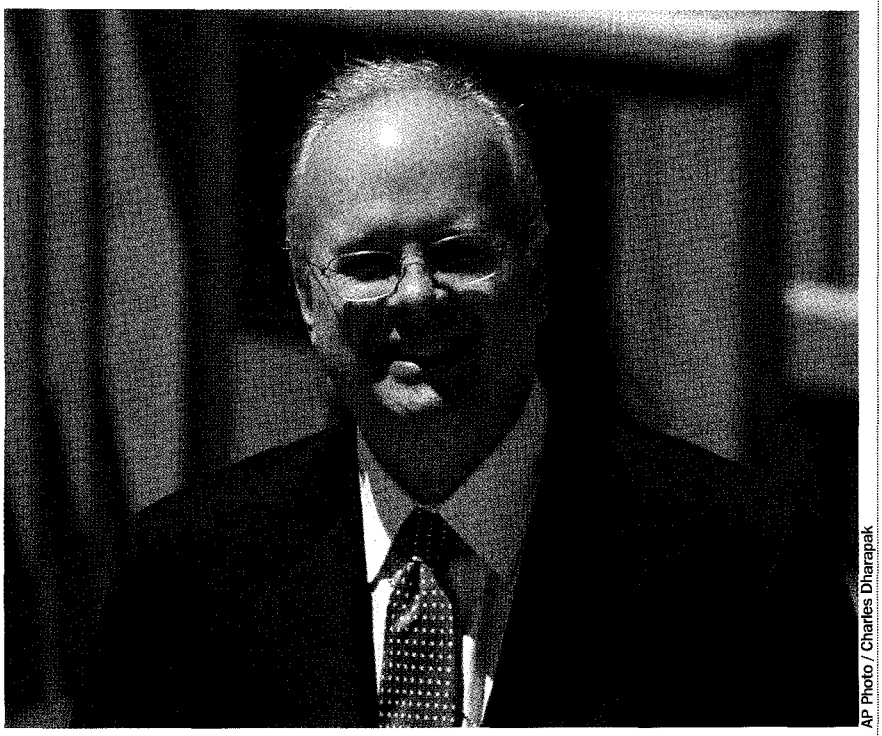
Karl Rove Laughs Last

Why his non-indictment is such good news for the Bush White House. BY FRED BARNES



AP Photo / Charles Dharapak

THE LEFTIES and the media are right about Karl Rove. That's why they're in a dither now that Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald has cleared Rove of any criminal wrongdoing in the overblown leak case involving CIA functionary Valerie Plame. The left and the mainstream press know three things about Rove: (1) He's the most influential White House aide ever; (2) his influence is almost always in a conservative direction; and (3) his downfall is (or was) key to bringing down the presidency of George W. Bush.

Many conservatives have never warmed to Rove, perhaps recalling his reputation as a Texas political consultant who could teach it round or teach it flat. They appreciate him merely in the sense that the enemy of their enemy is their friend. And Rove, as the indispensable aide to Bush, is certainly the enemy of the left and the media.

Keep in mind the media's unspoken goal since Vietnam and Watergate. It is, as Michael Barone wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, to "undermine" faith in America's leaders, especially the president, and even more so a conservative president. This explains the two questions about Rove at Bush's press conference last week.

Fitzgerald's decision not to seek an indictment of Rove was insufficient for the press. "Even if Karl Rove did nothing illegal," Bush was asked, "I wonder whether you can say now whether you approve of his conduct in the CIA leak episode and do you believe he owes [former press secretary] Scott McClellan or anyone else an apology for misleading them?" Bush ducked the question.

Another reporter followed up, asking if Bush had "learned anything" about his administration from the way Rove and others dealt with the CIA matter. "And do you have any work to do to rebuild credibility that might have been lost?" Bush ducked this question, too. Of course, all his aides did was knock down the now discredited claims about the intervention in Iraq made by former diplomat Joseph Wilson, whose wife worked for the CIA. It was public disclosure of her name that prompted Fitzgerald's investigation.

What if Rove had been indicted and forced to resign? The White House wouldn't have come unhinged. But its effectiveness in policy and politics would have been significantly diminished. Besides shaping the election strategy for the entire Republican party, Rove is the most important player at the White House, after the president, on both policy and politics. My rule of thumb is that whenever you think you've found an issue or project or concern at the White House (outside foreign policy) where Rove isn't involved—you're wrong. He's involved in some way or other, and, from a conservative standpoint, usually for the better.

Rove's all-inclusive reach makes him *sui generis*. There's never been another like him on a president's staff. "He's bigger than [Lee] Atwater on the political side and bigger than [Richard] Darman on the policy side," says Jeffrey Bell, a member of the American Conservative Union's board of directors. Darman worked in the Reagan and elder Bush's administrations, and Atwater was the elder Bush's political adviser. But no one said of either Darman or Atwater what a Bush aide says of Rove: "On the big policies, Karl is the sun and everyone else is the moon."

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD *and author of* Rebel-in-Chief.

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It's easy to demonstrate Rove's critical importance to Bush and, I think, to conservatives as well. Start with Bush's reelection campaign in 2004, and then consider two issues, Social Security reform and immigration.

At his press conference, Bush said that at one point in the 2004 election he was "probably down double digits" in the polls. "And they said, how can you possibly stand here and tell us you're going to get reelected?" In truth, it was never that bad for Bush. Absent Rove's campaign strategy, however, it might have been.

The Rove plan has been mischaracterized as a "base strategy," an appeal solely to conservatives and Republicans. Not so. Bush did concentrate on expanding his support among conservatives and Republicans. But the strategy was "far deeper and wider," says Bush adviser Peter Wehner. It was also tailored to increase his vote among Catholics, Jews, Hispanics, and blacks. And it succeeded.

On Social Security reform, I suspect the president would not have made it his top domestic priority in his second term without Rove's urging. In fact, he might not have broached the subject at all, despite having raised it in his 2000 campaign. But Rove was convinced the public was ready to accept sweeping reforms of Social Security. So Bush stepped front and center.

The conventional wisdom is that Bush's failed pitch for Social Security reform in 2005 was a political and substantive disaster. It surely didn't help Bush's job approval rating. The president moved the ball, though, making partial privatization far more publicly acceptable, but probably leaving the job of achieving it to a successor. Conservatives should be thrilled with Bush on Social Security since he boldly went where Reagan feared to tread.

On immigration, Rove has reinforced Bush's instincts, which are to seek the maximum—stiffer border enforcement, a temporary worker program, and earned citizenship for illegal immigrants living in the United States. This irritates conservatives who favor enforcement only, but matches the view of Reagan, the conservative standard-bearer.

Immigration affects the Hispanic vote, a long-term obsession of Rove and Bush. In 2004, Bush lifted the Republican share of that vote to 44 percent, a record for a Republican presidential candidate. Left to their own devices, conservatives and congressional Republicans would enact an enforcement-only bill that might drive away Hispanics and deny Republicans a lasting majority in America. Rove and Bush are eager to prevent that by saving conservatives from themselves.

During his three-year ordeal as a Fitzgerald target, Rove showed remarkable equanimity. A few weeks ago he apologized to counselor Michael Gerson for having been "distracted" by the investigation. Gerson responded that he hadn't noticed. Indeed, he really hadn't.

For all Rove's clout, the White House has not been unswervingly supportive of him. On *Fox News Sunday* on May 14, First Lady Laura Bush was asked by host Chris Wallace about the Marriage Protection Amendment that "Rove and congressional Republicans are planning to reintroduce." Mrs. Bush, who doesn't favor the amendment, responded waspishly, "I didn't know Karl was an elected official."

A month earlier, the White House announced that Joel Kaplan would replace Rove as deputy chief of staff for policy. The impression was left that Rove was being demoted and stripped of any policy role. He wasn't. And Rove continued his primary task as the White House official in charge of the paramount domestic policy issue of 2006, immigration. ♦

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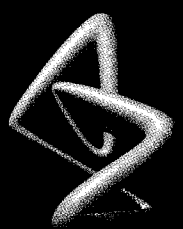

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Sects and Death in the Middle East

The culture that gave rise to Zarqawi.

BY LEE SMITH

Beirut

IT'S UNCLEAR how damaging the death of Abu Musab al Zarqawi will be to the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. But the admiration of sympathizers like Hamas, which called him a "brother-fighter," reminds us that he was not just a blood-drenched killer and lowlife. He was also the product of his region. The impact of his career on his extremist peers and the Middle East's Sunni mainstream will therefore bear close watching.

Even happier than the White House at his demise are Middle Eastern minorities, especially the Shiites, for they, rather than the Americans, were at the core of his exterminationist program. For Sunnis, the Shiites have always been barely tolerable heretics, but Zarqawi took this traditional loathing to new heights. Shortly before his death, he called Lebanon's fanatical Islamist militia Hezbollah a cover for Israel—because, after all, they were Shiites who stood between the Zionists and the wrath of the Sunni resistance.

Hezbollah general secretary Hassan Nasrallah and supporters were most certainly appalled and quite possibly terrified. After all, one reason for waging the "resistance" against Israel is to prove that the minority Shiites are Arabs in good standing just as much as the majority Sunnis. Indeed, since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah has been bragging that it was the first Arab group to make the Zionists taste defeat, and thus that the Shiites had managed to out-Sunni the Sunnis.

In effect, Zarqawi said he saw through the charade, and that Hezbollah should disarm—a demand that reminds us why it is probably going to be impossible to convince Nasrallah to give up his weapons peacefully. Hezbollah may well believe its own rhetoric—that only its militia can protect Lebanon from Israel. But the Shiites also have to worry that, if they put down their guns, they are vulnerable to Sunni violence, a threat that Zarqawi's spectacular Iraq campaign made very real to Shiites across the region. Thus, in response to the insult that he was doing the work of the Zionists, Nasrallah described Zarqawi in similar terms: "The killers in Iraq, no matter what sect they belong to, are Americans and Zionists and CIA and Mossad agents."

This Arab habit of blaming everything on the United States, or Israel, or the West in general, strikes many observers as evidence of faulty logical processes, or an abdication of basic political responsibility. But it is also part of an unspoken ceasefire pact—a reminder among Arabs that they have agreed not to attack each other and will focus their energies on external enemies in order to keep the peace at home.

For over half a century, Arab leaders from Nasser to Nasrallah have all sounded the same note—we Arabs are in a battle to the death against Israel, the United States, the West, colonialism, etc. Zarqawi broke that pact. We Sunnis are Arabs, said Zarqawi, but you lot are Shia and we will kill you.

And so Ayman al-Zawahiri's letter last year urging Zarqawi to leave the Shiites alone and focus on the Americans indicates that, at least compared with the late leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, the al Qaeda home office is staffed by rather mainstream Arab demagogues. Many Arabs believe that Israel would be lost without U.S. support. The same holds true in the bin Laden-Zawahiri worldview, where Washington is the only thing protecting weak Arab regimes from jihadist takeovers. Zarqawi believed, for whatever combination of religious, political, criminal, and sociopathic rationales, that to truly set the region in flames and bring down the established order, you get the people to fight each other.

Zarqawi tapped into the id of the region, the violent subterranean intra-Arab hatreds that no one wants to look at very closely, neither locals nor foreigners, because the picture it paints is so dauntingly gruesome that it suggests the Middle East will be a basket case for decades to come.

A recent Zogby poll on Arab TV-watching habits explained that Al Jazeera remains the most watched station in the region for foreign news. Curiously, the poll ignored Iraq, where 80 percent of the population, Shiites and Kurds, are not apt to patronize a media outlet that regards them as little more than fodder for the heroic Sunni struggle against the Americans and Zionists.

That other 20 percent of Iraq was Zarqawi's target constituency, his Sunni base, and it is a much, much larger number outside of Iraq. It includes not just *takfiris* like himself—extremists who believe in murdering infidels and heretics. It comprises a mournful Hamas government, elected by a majority of Palestinians, and "moderate" Islamists like the four parliamentarians from Jordan's Islamic Action Front now facing prosecution for openly lamenting the death of a man who had repeatedly targeted the Royal Hashemite Kingdom. Certainly not all Sunni Arabs approved of Zarqawi's tactics, but many agreed that someone had to put the Shiites back in their place lest

Lee Smith, a Hudson Institute visiting fellow based in Beirut, is writing a book on Arab culture.

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they misunderstand what is in store for them once the Americans leave.

Last year, Jordan's King Abdullah famously warned of a Shiite crescent —a sphere of influence running from Iran to Lebanon—and Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak has accused Shiites of being more loyal to Iran than the countries they live in. And these are the heads of the two major Arab states that are almost devoid of Shiites. Feelings run even higher elsewhere in the region.

In Saudi Arabia, the mere existence of Shiites in the Eastern Province threatens not only the kingdom's primary source of income, oil, but also the very legitimacy of Wahhabi rule. After all, as true Wahhabis, shouldn't they be converting or killing Shiites, as the founder of the country, Ibn Saud, once insisted? Further west in Syria, the Sunni majority has been grating for more than 40 years under the rule of a Shia sect, the Alawites, who have now cost the Sunni merchant class in both money and prestige. The Assad regime has so isolated Syria from the rest of the international community that its only ally is the Islamist Republic of Iran. And then there is Lebanon, where Hezbollah has effectively usurped the mantle of Arab militancy from the Sunnis.

To your average Joe Sunni, then, it's good that Osama bin Laden kills Americans. And it's wonderful that the Palestinian groups kill Israelis. But Zarqawi was the man in the trenches who went after the heretics that Sunni Arabs all actually have to live with every day, and have successfully kept in their place for a millennium now, and don't ever want overturning the scales.

The sectarianism of Iraq has been topic A in Washington ever since the war began. And yet it is not merely a temporary eruption at a time of crisis, but rather a permanent and defining feature of every Arab society, and you don't have to scratch beneath the surface of things to find it. Sometimes, it's just gossip and banter, as in Lebanon, where I've heard Sunni women talk about the disgusting way that Shiites hang their laundry. A Christian friend married to a Shiite confided his concern that their daughter's fashion sense was becoming gaudily Shiite. The Sunnis say, eat with a Druze but sleep with a Christian—meaning the Christians are filthy but the Druze are untrustworthy and will slaughter you in your bed. Some exchange Jew for Druze.

Other times, the gossip turns to folk wisdom. Some Sunnis really believe that Shiites have little tails. And there are scores of volumes of age-old Shiite propaganda about the bizarre sexual practices of Sunnis. Much of the sectarian enmity, in fact, partakes of sexual loathing and envy. Sunni women, for instance, are famously believed by their detractors to relish anal sex. Recently, Hezbollah supporters surrounded a Sunni neighborhood in Beirut, where they insulted deputy Saad al-Hariri, chanting "the c— of his sister, the c— of his mother."

Many Arabs believe that Syria's Alawites engage in pagan orgies where men sleep with each other's wives, or with their daughters, or with each other. Osama bin Laden's mother, as it happens, is an Alawite, which is strange only in that the 14th-century jurist and father of modern jihad Ibn Taymiyya, one of bin Laden's role models, thought the Alawites were "more infidel than Jews or Christians, even more infidel than many pagans." He wrote, "War and punishment in accordance with Islamic law against them are among the greatest of pious deeds and the most important obligation."

Of course, most people don't speak about sectarian hatreds publicly. In Syria, the Alawite government has made it very dangerous to talk about sects. In Lebanon, people are too polite to ask you directly what you are, and so to find out, they will ask you your last name, your neighborhood, your school, your father's name, his hometown. The well-educated Arab classes are especially careful about speaking in sectarian terms in front of Westerners, because, as elites talking to elites, they believe that Westerners think religious faith is bizarre to begin with and sectarianism evidence of a primitive society. To hear many Iraqi officials and journalists describe their country, there is so much intermarriage between the sects and tribes that their Iraq, the non-Zarqawi Iraq, actually looks something like a page out of the *New York Times* wedding announcements. And to be fair, a case can be made that 20th-century Iraq was at times among the most cosmopolitan of Arab societies.

But to downplay sectarian issues is to risk misunderstanding the real problems in Iraq. There are already scores of books and articles detailing how the Bush team screwed up the war or the postwar occupation, some written by former administration

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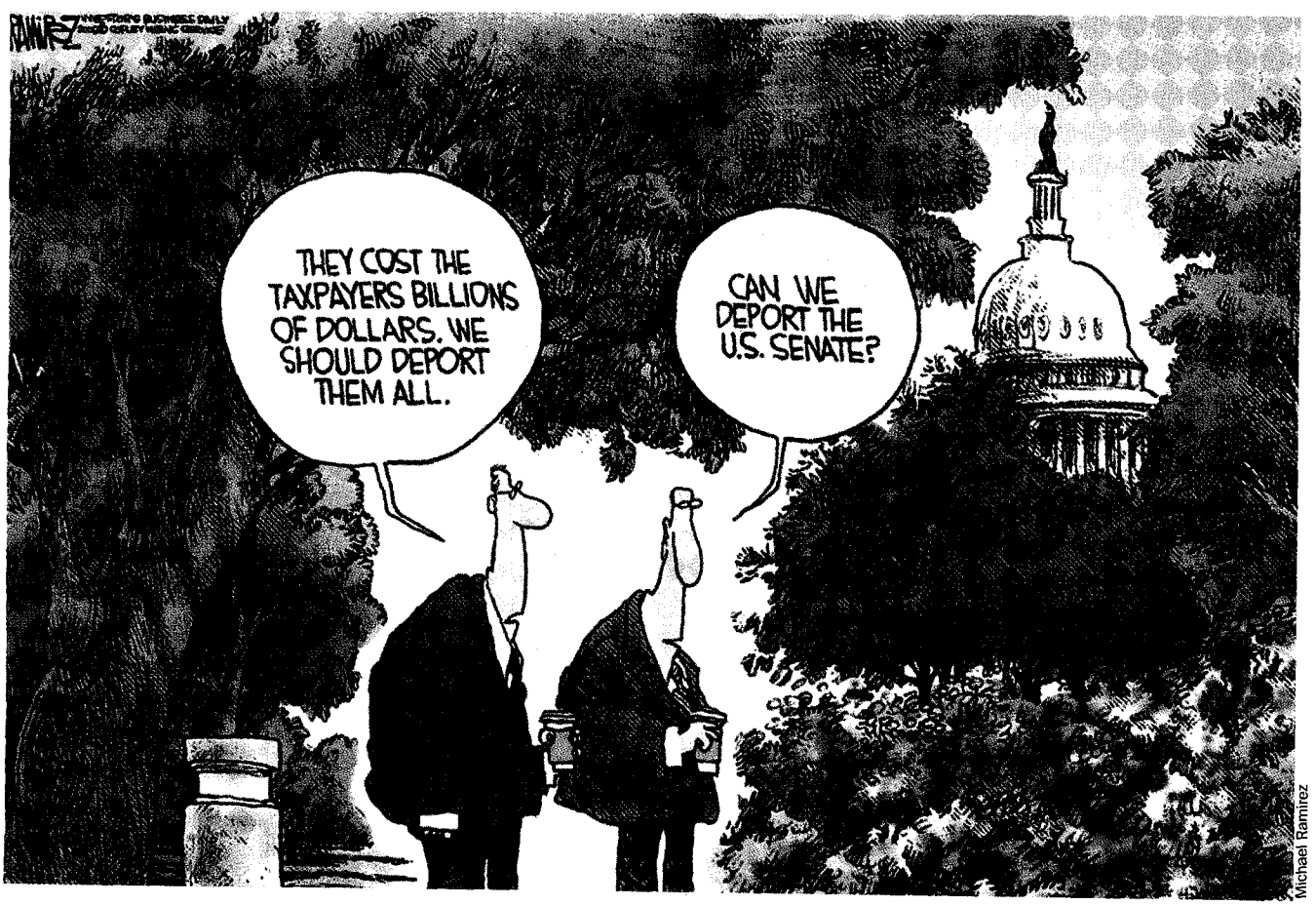
employees, others the mea culpas of self-described onetime true believers. But the biggest problem in Iraq isn't really the stupidity or arrogance or incompetence of the Bush administration. The real stumbling block isn't getting Iraq's electricity or water on full blast. Police and army recruits aren't bound and tortured before they are decapitated or shot in the head because of premature or insufficient de-Baathification, or because the State Department and the Pentagon were fighting over the role of Ahmad Chalabi. Americans should have provided better security, and more overwhelming force. But the political and religious cover so amply offered to the assassins of ordinary Iraqis did not issue from the office of the Coalition Provisional Authority or the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. No American exhorted Sunni or Shiite gangs to butcher their neighbors. The American arguments over Iraq sometimes achieve truly astonishing levels of parochialism and self-obsession. The problem in Iraq is Iraq. More broadly speaking, it is the problem of Arab society. Intolerance of the other, fear of the other, is always there.

Osama bin Laden, some Middle Eastern wags like to joke, is the father of Arab democracy, for without September 11, the United States would have gone on ignoring the region. But Zarqawi is the real radical, for he exploited and illuminated the region's oldest and deepest hatreds. And he stayed on message until it was very difficult to argue that the root causes of violence in the Middle East are colonialism, imperialism, and Zionism.

Zarqawi made it clear, if it wasn't already, that a more "even-handed approach" toward the Israeli-Palestinian crisis will not really defuse tensions in the Middle East. That particular problem, at least in its political dimensions, goes back at most only to 1860; the Sunni-Shiite split begins with the death of the prophet Muhammad. Zarqawi also made it clear, if it wasn't already, that getting U.S. troops out of Saudi Arabia will not really calm jihadi fervor, because the American military is just one among the many valuable targets the jihadists see in the greater Middle East.

The world looks like a different place thanks to Abu Musab al Zarqawi, for without him the obtuse, the partisan, and the dishonest would still have room to talk about root causes and such stuff and reason away mass murder and sectarian fear and loathing. Zarqawi clarified things. If his death turns out to be a turning point in the war or the political development of Iraq, we will not know for many years, maybe decades. But it will only be a turning point if, having held up a mirror to the people who quietly cheered him on, they recoil from what he showed them. ♦



Michael Ramirez

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Some Peace Movement

Where are Germany's peaceniks now?

BY JEFFREY GEDMIN

Berlin

Earlier this month, several hundred people gathered in Nuremberg, the site of an Iran-Mexico soccer match, for a protest. Their concern was that Iran's president might fly to Germany to attend the World Cup match. According to a German peace activist newsletter, the crowd of protesters was most unimpressive, a bunch of losers really. Those denouncing Iran's head of state were a motley crew of "Christian Crazies," "anti-German Germans," and "cheering Persians," the last being "loyalists of the mass-murdering regime of the shah."

It's not the first time I have wondered about Germany's real peace activists. Speaking of mass murder, I walk by the North Korean embassy nearly every day in Berlin. It's a stone's throw from my apartment in Mitte near Friedrichstrasse. Although North Korea is the last Stalinist regime on earth, and is building nuclear weapons while starving its population to death, I've not seen a single concerned citizen from the peace movement with a sign or a flower before the embassy's entrance. Meanwhile, the number of protests here calling for an end to the slaughter in Sudan stands by my count at about zero. Still, Iran should be a no-brainer. Or so you would think.

The German peace movement has always been antinuclear. Iran wants the bomb. The peace movement loves the U.N. and international law. Tehran defies the International Atomic Energy Agency. The peace movement condemns the "arms race." When Iran goes nuclear, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey will also want the bomb. The peace movement cherishes human rights. The mullahs stone women to death. The peace movement is modern, multicultural, and secular. President Ahmadinejad believes in the Hidden Imam and relishes a good clash of civilizations. The peace movement likes peace. The Iranian leader has called for a U.N. member state to be wiped off the face of the earth.

Okay, it is tedious to state the obvious, but the German peace movement —always the largest, most vocal, and best organized in Europe—is once again exposed as a farce and a fraud. During the Cold War it thrived on anti-Americanism and a good dose of Soviet bloc support. In the '80s, for example, East Germany's secret police helped finance the work of "Generals for Peace," a group of eight former NATO generals opposed to the stationing of NATO missiles in Western Europe. These included the lover of Petra Kelly, the desperate, strident young woman who helped start the Greens. Kelly and General Bastian killed themselves in an apparent suicide pact in Bonn in the fall of 1992.

The peace movement was back in top form recently when George W. Bush said he would compel Saddam Hussein to comply with U.N. resolutions. In Berlin, half a million people took to the streets (their counterparts were out in full force across Europe and in the United States, of course, too). Teachers in Berlin let students out of school to march for peace. The churches were there. So were the trade unions. At night there were candlelight processions at the Brandenburg Gate. It is hard to remember any of these folks lifting a finger for the good people of Iraq before or since. I recall a few dozen lonely souls protesting here against Saddam Hussein.

And all those banners declaring "No Blood for Oil"? That's always been an amusing bit of shtick. Europe depends on Middle Eastern oil even more than the United States. Saudi Arabia is one of Germany's most important trading partners in the region. Iran is the other. I am waiting for someone from the peace movement to catch on. In 2004, while Gerhard Schröder was still in office, German exports to Iran rose by 33.4 percent (3.6 billion euros). Last year the figure hit 4.5 billion euros. German imports also rose by 35 percent (391 million euros) two years ago, with the first expansion of crude oil deliveries. The former chancellor, now chairman of the supervisory board of Russia's Gazprom—let's call him father of the modern German peace movement—was just named honorary chairman of the German Near and Middle East Association. This is an umbrella group for German industry. And Schröder is now speaking out against sanctions on Iran.

Angela Merkel has been great on Iran. She has not yet sat down to discuss with top industry leaders, though, the impact of possible sanctions on German companies and an ailing German economy. Volkswagen is in Iran. DaimlerChrysler is there. German companies sell the Iranians machinery, production facilities, and electrical engineering products. The German-Iranian Chamber of Industry and Commerce, according to a newsletter of the Iranian German Business Forum, is one of Germany's largest in the world. It tends to the needs of some 1,400 member firms from both countries. But you would think that for the peace movement a little prudence would be in order. You would think that for progressives, human rights would trump profits.

What's really amusing (or creepy) is not the glaring hypocrisy of the peace movement's inaction over Iran (or Sudan, North Korea, and Syria for that matter), but rather what some of these oily groups are serving up at smaller

Jeffrey Gedmin is director of the Aspen Institute Berlin.

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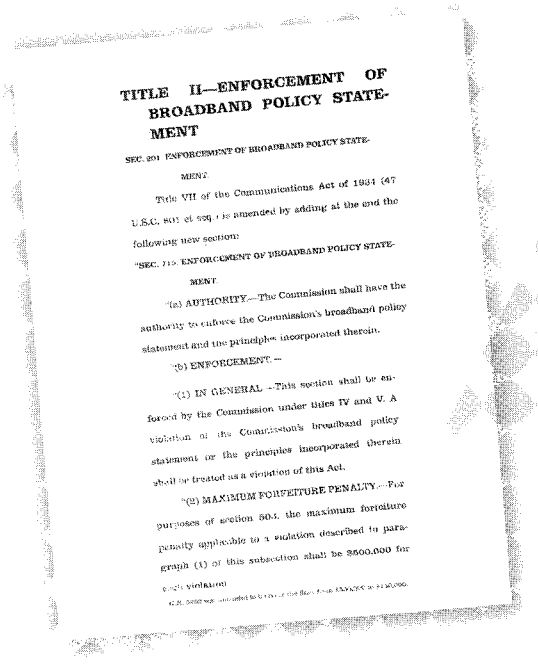

TITLE II—ENFORCEMENT OF BROADBAND POLICY STATEMENT

SEC. 201. ENFORCEMENT OF BROADBAND POLICY STATEMENT.

Title VII of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 801 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

"SEC. 715. ENFORCEMENT OF BROADBAND POLICY STATEMENT.

"(a) AUTHORITY.—The Commission shall have the authority to enforce the Commission's broadband policy statement and the principles incorporated therein.

"(b) ENFORCEMENT.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—This section shall be enforced by the Commission under titles IV and V. A violation of the Commission's broadband policy statement or the principles incorporated therein shall be treated as a violation of this Act.

"(2) MAXIMUM FORFEITURE PENALTY.—For purposes of section 503, the maximum forfeiture penalty applicable to a violation described in paragraph (1) of this subsection shall be $500,000 for each violation.

"A violation of the Commission's broadband policy statement or the principles incorporated therein shall be treated as a violation of this Act."

- H.R. 5252, Communications Opportunity, Promotion, and Enhancement Act, pg. 41-42

The Barton-Rush bill enhances the Federal Communications Commission's ability to enforce policies that have successfully encouraged Internet growth and innovation.

The bill gives new teeth to the FCC's existing policy that maintains an open Internet without legislating massive new regulations.

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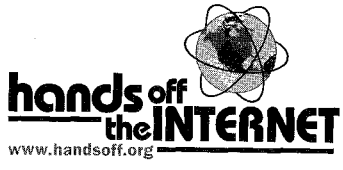

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meetings and online publications these days. The *Network of the German Peace Movement* is worried that a "pro-Western government" could come to power in Iran. The *German Peace Society* says Iran needs the bomb to defend itself against America and Israel. Professor Georg Meggle of the University of Leipzig agrees. In a policy paper written for the Peace Research Group at the University of Kassel, Meggle says, "Iran would be stupid" not to pursue its current course.

The Nobel-winning novelist Günter Grass told the international PEN writers congress in Berlin last month, "Nothing could be more stupid or dangerous than to call Iran, North Korea, or Syria evil powers." The Berlin office of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War has released a paper describing what will happen if the United States launches a nuclear attack against Iran. More than 2 million people will die in the first 48 hours apparently; another million will be seriously injured. More than 10 million in the region will suffer the effects of radiation. And I thought we were just talking about a land invasion and occupation.

What about the damage expected from an Iranian nuclear strike? When America went into Afghanistan after 9/11, the cover of *Stern* magazine, the popular German weekly, blared "Stop this War." Inside the magazine were statements by 44 prominent intellectual, political, and cultural figures demanding an end to American aggression. According to my colleague Alexander Arndt, no more than two of these great humanitarians have taken time publicly to raise concern about Iran's human rights record or the prospect of the mullahs getting nuclear weapons. To be fair, some of our peace friends may be more reasonable than I have suggested. One peace-movement blogger says that while Iran is indeed "a friend of ours," maybe the Iranian leadership "is getting a bit carried away of late." He does not elaborate, but I wonder if he is referring to that small matter of President Ahmadinejad denying the Holocaust. I guess we all have our limits. ♦

The Catman Cometh

Among the Transhumanists.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW what it feels like to wander into a Salvador Dali painting, try attending a conference of transhumanists. Case in point: the symposium "Human Enhancement Technologies and Human Rights" hosted May 26-28 by the Stanford Law School.

Transhumanism is a radical movement emanating from the universities that seeks to enhance human capacities via technology. The ultimate goal is a utopian world of "post-humans," such as human/robot hybrids and human consciousnesses downloaded into computers that will live for thousands of years.

But getting from here to post-humanity will exact a steep moral price. James Hughes, a professor of health policy at Hartford's Trinity College and author of the transhumanist manifesto *Citizen Cyborg*, insists that we must cast off "human racism," the belief that humans possess unique moral status flowing from their humanity.

In place of humanness as the conveyor of rights, Hughes urges society to substitute "personhood"—a status earned upon achieving "brain birth" and becoming self-aware. Under personhood theory, some humans would be excluded, but all self-aware entities—whether human, post-human, machine, chimera, or robot—would qualify for the rights, privileges, and protections of citizenship.

The conference was rife with such futuristic mumbo-jumbo. Nick Bostrom—cofounder of the World Transhumanist Association—wants to protect "post-human dignity." Bostrom once taught at Yale but got promoted to Oxford, where he directs the Future of Humanity Institute. He is currently working out the ethical issues involved in the creation of artificial minds.

While his thoughts remain "a work in progress," Bostrom stated that society must understand that discrimination "based on substrate"—the kind of material from which a being is made, whether organic, silicon, or other—is as odious as racism. Ditto discrimination based on "ontogeny," that is, how a consciousness comes into existence, which I guess means whether it is born, assembled, or hatched.

Other presentations revealed transhumanism to be obsessively solipsistic. The Catman was held up as an example of early transhumanized recreationism. Catman—whose real name is Dennis Avner—has tattooed his face, sharpened his teeth, undergone cosmetic surgeries, had "whisker" implants, and reportedly wants a tail implant—all to make himself look like a cat.

Catman is weird, but of no real concern except for the harm he has done himself. His transhumanizing, after all, is merely skin deep. If he sired a son, the child wouldn't be Kittenboy. But transhumanists ultimately want to do more than make Halloween costumes of their own bodies. Posthuman enhancements are meant to flow down the generations, including through the genetic design of offspring, resulting eventually in the yearned for, radi-

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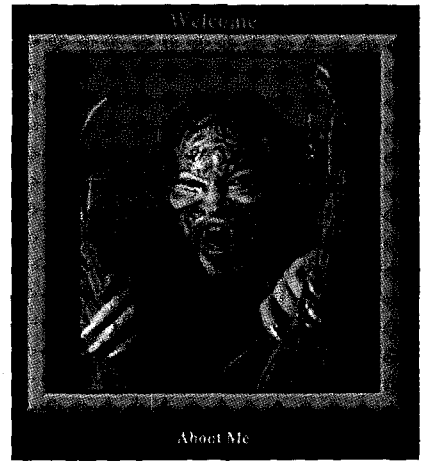
cally individualized posthuman species. (Of course, given the power of peer pressure, successful transhumanizing might well result in stultifying sameness, a concern acknowledged by at least one presenter at the conference. Indeed, many of the male transhumanist attendees looked a lot alike, with shaved heads and close-trimmed Vandyke beards.)

No gathering of radical academics would be complete without attacks on the patriarchy. Thus, Annalee Newitz, a contributing editor at *Wired* magazine, told conferees that a proper feminist transhumanism should "fix" female biology so that women can exert "better control over female evolution." It will also permit "reimagining the family." Posthuman women "will not have to rely on men for genetic material" if they want babies, and men will be able to become biological mothers by being surgically altered. Artificial wombs are a must so that gestation does not keep women from "important work." Until that great day dawns, women can at least be freed from "unnecessary" menstruation through a new birth control pill that inhibits menses for up to three months.

A near-absolute right to be "enhanced"—even if it is physically harmful—was advocated by Susan Stryker, an expert in transgender studies, and Nikki Sullivan, an Australian college lecturer and author of books on tattooing and body modification. Their joint paper on "transsexual surgery and self-demand amputation" seemed to favor—though it was hard to figure out exactly what they were saying—allowing people to have healthy limbs removed if they want to, by analogy with transsexuals, who are permitted to surgically change their sex. The idea, Stryker told me later, is to allow people with Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID) to become "whole"—even if that means becoming a one-armed man or a legless woman.

Matters became even more surreal when George Dvorsky, deputy editor of the online transhumanist journal *Betterhumans*, asserted that people have a moral duty to use genetic and other enhancements to "uplift" animals to human levels of intelligence—at which point animals, too, are to achieve some sort of engagement with the Internet. "Nature causes suffering," Dvorsky said. "The goal is to end all suffering," including animal predation against other animals. Thus, all mammalian life—including us—must become "post-biological," and so eliminate suffering by moving us all beyond the "hazards of nature."

For all of its emphasis on enhancement, the emotional core of transhumanism is a yearning for immortal-



Catman's website

ity. This obsession with defeating death made the eccentric transhumanist anti-aging researcher, Cambridge professor Aubrey de Grey, the clear star of the conference. De Grey's presentation was entitled "Our Right to Life." It had to do not with abortion or euthanasia but with humans' putative right never to die.

To actualize this right, de Grey—whose long, dark beard and ponytail make him look like a cross between ZZ Top and Rasputin—is working on a "cure" for human aging that will erase the "physiological differences between older and younger adults." This effort, along with his cofounding of the Methuselah Mouse Prize that will award millions to scientists who break records for extending the lifespan of mice, has made de Grey something of an international media darling, in particular the subject of an admiring segment on *60 Minutes*.

De Grey is obsessed with his work and believes we should be too. He told the conferees that inaction—society's unwillingness to make the arresting of aging its top scientific funding priority—is really a form of action, akin to killing the people who would be saved if the research were bounteously supported. He even asserted that anti-aging research is more important than access to health care in Africa, and he likened the withholding of funds from anti-aging research to "killing with a time bomb in a car."

We shouldn't take all of this too seriously, of course. Transhumanism is mostly an intellectual game, a fantasy. The technological breakthroughs necessary to create a true post-humanity will almost surely never come.

But this doesn't mean that transhumanism is benign—far from it. Dismissing the intrinsic value of human life is always dangerous, and presuming to determine which human traits are desirable and which not leads to very dark places. Thus, a new eugenics has arisen. About 90 percent of Down's syndrome babies are aborted in the United States. In Brave New Britain, late-term babies with correctable conditions such as cleft palates and clubfeet are being aborted, while embryos are destroyed because they exhibit a genetic propensity to adult onset cancer. Meanwhile, many bioethicists urge that we redefine death to include a diagnosis of persistent vegetative state so that the organs of the cognitively devastated can be harvested.

Perhaps predictably, government is being seduced by transhumanist fantasies. In 2002, the National Science Foundation and U.S. Department of Commerce issued a report—"Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance"—that recommended government spend billions pursuing technologies that transhumanists crave. Sounding a lot like Aubrey de Grey (and Al Gore), the report warns that success "is essential to the future of humanity." If we but pursue the dream, it enthuses, "the

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Where will we get that oil? We need to have a balanced energy approach. We should look first here at home. The government estimates some 31 billion barrels of undiscovered, technically recoverable oil are available on federal lands currently closed to development. That's more than enough oil to power 35 million cars and heat 14 million homes for 30 years.

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twenty-first century could end in world peace, universal prosperity, and evolution to a higher level of compassion and accomplishment. . . . [H]umanity would become like a single, distributed and interconnected 'brain' based in new core pathways of society."

Meanwhile, back on planet Earth, a $773,000 down payment on those billions was just paid by the National Institutes of Health to Case Law School in Cleveland for a two-year project to determine whether and how "ethically acceptable rules" could "establish the safety and efficacy of genetic technologies intended for enhancement rather than therapy," enhancement being defined as improving "form and function beyond the base-line of normalcy." By paying bioethicists to contemplate and perhaps draft guidelines for future human enhancement research, NIH is encouraging scientists to embrace the transhumanist dream.

Transhumanists like to say that their movement cannot be stopped, that we are already on the slippery slope to the posthuman future, so we might as well enjoy the ride. And it is true: We increasingly use technologies and medications intended originally for therapeutic purposes to "enhance" ourselves. Cosmetic surgery is a growth industry, steroid use is rampant, and Viagra isn't just used to treat impotence anymore. And medical advances will continue to increase life expectancy and health in old age.

But, as Roseanne Roseannadanna used to say, "If it's not one thing, it's another." Even if cancer is eradicated and the aging process slows, other afflictions will do the job. Just read the headlines: After 25 years, we still can't cure AIDS. Antibiotics are beginning to fail. That endlessly incipient bird flu pandemic could actually appear. All of the fantasizing about living forever and morphing into "post-biological units" won't change the hard fact that we are born to die. Far better, then, to embrace our fully human lives than to seek in vain for a post-human future that will never come. ♦

Give Me Bandwidth . . .

No one to root for in the net neutrality debate.

BY ANDY KESSLER

FINDING IT HARD to understand the "net neutrality" debate? On one side are the hip, cool, billionaire web service companies like Google, eBay, Yahoo, and even Microsoft. Net neutrality is their rallying cry. Despite the fact that they are basically schlocky ad salesmen on a grand scale, they're pushing this quaint, self-serving '60s notion that the Internet is a town square—all for one and one for them, or something like that. Everyone should be allowed to hang out in the town square and use it as they please, one low price, eat all you want at the buffet.

On the other side are the monopolist plumbers like Verizon and AT&T and Comcast. These are the folks who laid the pipe that delivers the Internet—the blogs and pirated movies and photos of Shiloh Brangelina—to your house or office. They think the Internet is more like a giant shopping mall, and they're the mall owners. You the customer can walk around as if you were in the town square, but the tenants (see billionaire web service companies above) are going to have to pay for the upkeep of the premises. If they're one of the anchor stores, they might pay a lot.

In an effort to skim their own fees off the Google crowd, lobbyists and Congress have also taken up the fight. So far, the telcos are winning—a bid to add net neutrality language to a telecommunications bill was shot down 269-152 by the House on June 8—but this is one of those bizarre issues where both sides are off their rocker.

If Congress doesn't act, does this mean Apple might pay 10 cents per iTunes download to Bellsouth? Will Google have to pay 5 percent of ad revenue to AT&T for speedy delivery of your search results? Will we pay $1 per video played in your browser to Comcast? Silly, right? Well, not so fast, and that's the problem.

Telcos and cable companies have no choice but to lobby for legislation that bars neutrality. Because without the ability to extract money from the webbies for the use of their not-so-fast Alexander Graham Bell-era wires (forget that you and I already overpay for this), AT&T or Verizon might not have *any* business model going forward. With no real competition, they'd rather keep U.S. telecommunications in the Flintstone era and overcharge for calls to Grandma than upgrade their networks. Since 1998, telecommunications companies have outspent computer and Internet firms on politicians $231 million to $71 million, just to keep the status quo.

Hate to break the news, but your "fast" DSL Internet access is no longer considered high speed. In parts of the world, cell phones are faster. Have you wondered why Internet video doesn't fill your computer monitor and look like a DVD, but instead is pixelated dreck in a tiny one or two inch square? Well, Comcast is dragging its heels, too. With better video over the Internet, who would want E!, let alone the

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Style Network? Because of this Fred and Wilma thinking, the United States is 16th in the world in broadband use (behind Liechtenstein!) with East Timor catching up fast. The French may burn Citroëns, but they get 10 megabits for 10 euros—50 times your "fast" Internet access for half the price. That's just not right.

We'll never get 10 megabits to our homes, let alone the multiples of that speed that are possible and affordable *today* if these telco Goliaths keep covering up their crown jewels. As Dean Wormer might put it: Fat, drunk (on profits), and stupid is no way to go through life, son.

But the answer is not regulations imposing net neutrality. You can already smell the mandates and the loopholes once Congress gets involved. Think special, high-speed priority for campaign commercials or educational videos about global warming. Or roadblocks—like requiring emergency 911 service—to try to kill off free Internet telephone services such as Skype. And who knows what else? Network neutrality won't be the laissez-faire sandbox its supporters think, but more like used kitty litter. We all know that regulations beget more lobbyists. I'd rather let the market sort these things out.

But what market? Phone lines, cable, and cellular—i.e., the means of Internet access—are all regulated; their operators are quasi-monopolies. Even if you end the monopolies, the incumbents have the advantage of a huge head start. Broadcasters own valuable spectrum and feed us cretinous shows like *Wife Swap* and *The Bachelor*. Cable has a lock on our homes via local franchise bribes, er, fees, so we get Lifetime and Animal Planet that no one watches. Satellite TV is content to charge just a hair under cable's pricing umbrella. For phone companies, too much Internet bandwidth would threaten their bread and butter—overpriced $25 per month (it's worth no more than $1) phone service and hot innovations like call waiting.

So how do we fix this? Are we stuck in telco hell? Silicon Valley can ignite a political arms race and spend more on lobbyists, but why play an old man's game? Instead, these webbies should get creative, change the rules. Bam-Bam, not Barney Rubble is the future. Take the telcos and cable companies out at the knees.

Here's an idea: Start screaming like a madman and using four letter words—like K-E-L-O. And fancier words like "eminent domain." I know, I know. This sounds wrong. These are privately owned wires hanging on poles. But so what? The government-mandated owners have been neglecting them for years—we are left with slums in need of redevelopment. Horse-drawn trolleys ruled cities, too, but had to be destroyed to make way for progress. How do we rip the telco's trolley tracks out and enable something modern and real competition?

Forget the argument that telcos need to be guaranteed a return on investment or they won't upgrade our bandwidth. No one guarantees Intel a return before they spend billions in R&D on their next Pentium chip to beat their competitors at AMD. No one guarantees Cisco a return on their investment before they deploy their next router to beat Juniper. In real, competitive markets, the market provides access to capital.

Without even being paid by the hour, I read through the Supreme Court's *Kelo* v. *City of New London* eminent domain rulings. Surely there exists some clever Silicon Valley counsel to twist the wording of the precedent. The telcos may want to treat the Internet like a shopping mall that they own, but the premises are looking awfully sketchy. So start with this line: *"Economic underdevelopment and stagnation are also threats to the public sufficient to make their removal cognizable as a public purpose."*

Sure, property rights are important, but that doesn't mean we can't shake a cattle prod at our stagnant monopolists and say "update or get out of the way." The mantra should be "megabits to phones and gigabits to homes." We'll only get there via competition. Regulations—even regulations that look friendly to the Googles and Yahoos and hostile to the telcos—will just freeze us where we are today.

In the long run, technology doesn't sleep. You can't keep competitive King Kong in chains. But why wait a decade while lobbyists run interference? If Congress does nothing, we will probably end up paying more for a fast network optimized for Internet phone calls and video and shopping. But this may not be the only possible outcome. Maybe the incumbent network providers—the Verizons, Comcasts, AT&Ts—can be made to compete; threatening to seize their stagnating networks via eminent domain is just one creative idea to get them to do this. A truly competitive, non-neutral network could work, but only if we know its real economic value. If telcos or cable charge too much, someone should be in a position to steal the customer. Maybe then we'd see useful services and a better Internet. Sounds like capitalism.

What new things? It's not just more bandwidth and better Internet video—how about no more phone numbers, just a name and the service finds you? How about subscribing to a channel and being able to watch it when and where you want, on your TV, iPod, or laptop? How about a baby monitor you can view through your cell phone? Something worth paying for. And that's just the easy stuff.

We don't even know what new things are possible. Bandwidth is like putty in the hands of entrepreneurs—new regulations are cement. We don't want a town square or a dilapidated mall—we want a vibrant metropolis. Net neutrality is already the boring old status quo. But don't give in to the cable/telco status quo either. Far better to have competition, as long as it's real, than let Congress shape the coming communications chaos and creativity. ♦

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Betting on the Bloggers

Democrats should hope that what happened at Vegas stays in Vegas

By Matthew Continetti

Las Vegas

In 1971, Markos Moulitsas was born in Chicago. In 2002, when he started his website, Daily Kos, Moulitsas was an unemployed tech worker living in Berkeley. On a June morning in 2006, as he stood inside the Riviera hotel and casino here, Moulitsas was the most influential blogger in the Democratic party, and about to introduce one of that party's most prominent politicians—the governor of New Mexico and former secretary of energy, Bill Richardson, who sat on a stool in the middle of the room, smiling wanly while looking tired and more than a little confused.

"I get to introduce everybody," Moulitsas told the small group of bloggers attending the breakfast with Richardson. "It's one of the perks of being who I am now. It's pretty cool."

It was the second morning of the first annual YearlyKos, a gathering of more than 900 left-wing bloggers, more than 100 journalists, and half a dozen national Democratic politicians, all inspired by Moulitsas's website. For the bloggers, the road to Las Vegas had been long. One of Moulitsas's readers, a former secondary school teacher named Gina Cooper, first had the idea for the gathering shortly after the 2004 elections. She approached Moulitsas, who lent his moniker while leaving most of the organizing to Cooper and more than two dozen unpaid volunteers.

Their central achievement was getting the Senate Democratic leader, Harry Reid of Nevada, whose hometown is 45 minutes south of here, to agree to attend. Once that happened, other politicians signed on: Mark Warner, the former governor of Virginia and prospective presidential candidate; Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean; California senator Barbara Boxer; House minority leader Nancy Pelosi (who cancelled at the last minute); Iowa governor and prospective presidential candidate Tom Vilsack; and the once and future presidential candidate General Wesley Clark.

And Richardson. The governor has been in politics for a long time, and is a master of the art—always ready with an answer, articulate, assured yet self-deprecating. But his form of politics is different from the bloggers'. They spend their time online, reading and sometimes commenting on each other's posts about the latest Republican evils. By contrast, Richardson currently holds the world handshaking record. He's a one-on-one pol who bases his appeals on human interaction. He's probably never "blogged" in his life.

That much was apparent, anyway, when, more than halfway through his talk, Richardson told the bloggers, "I think many of your customers . . . " Then he paused. "Readers," he said. Then he paused again, and turned to Moulitsas. "What do you call your readers?" he asked. "Customers?"

"Readers," a few people said.

"Readers," Richardson said, resuming his speech.

The governor's slip-up seemed to bother no one, which makes sense, considering it occurred in the middle of what could only be called a slavish attempt to further inflate the bloggers' already considerable self-regard. At one point, Richardson said, "I am here most of the morning to recognize you guys, to recognize the power of bloggers." Later, he said, "I wanted to meet you," before flashing a smile and asking, "I'm paying for this breakfast, aren't I?" Later still, he said, "I see you guys as agents of advocacy."

And then, just to make sure he got his point across, Richardson repeated: "I'm mainly here to acknowledge that you guys are big players."

Are they? Certainly the bloggers think so. In his opening-night keynote address, Moulitsas told the crowd, "These have been heady days for the People Power Movement. And it's only four years old."

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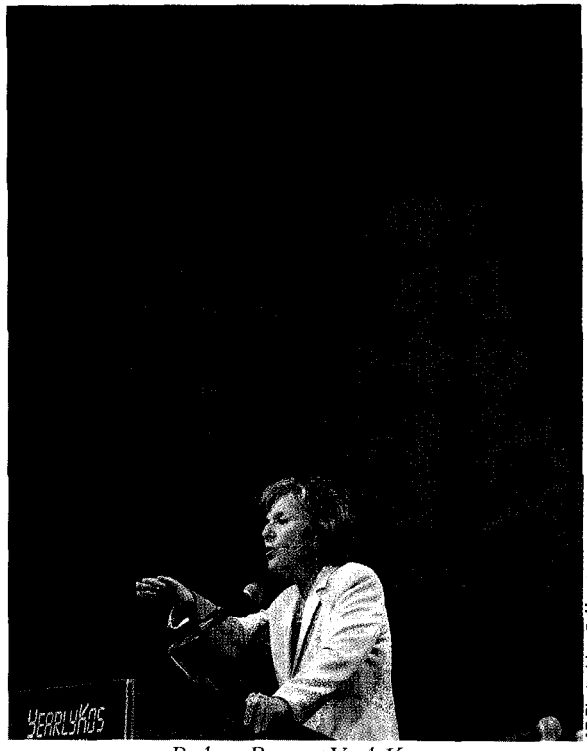
The politicians seem to agree. "You are an unstoppable force in educating Americans on important issues and ensuring the American people know the truth," Sen. Reid wrote in a letter to each attendee. In her speech, Sen. Boxer said, "The netroots"—another word for the left-wing blogs—"is key to giving people courage and strength to stand up—even when it's lonely." The next morning, Howard Dean told the crowd, "You are the first generation, I think, that [are] citizens of the whole world, because of the Net."

How many lefty political bloggers there actually *are* is unclear. The press often cites the figure that Daily Kos receives more than 600,000 unique visitors a day. Yet Moulitsas's bio on the jacket of *Crashing the Gate*, the new book he wrote with fellow blogger and Democratic strategist Jerome Armstrong, claims Daily Kos "now gets more than a million unique visitors each day."

Inside *Crashing the Gate*, Armstrong and Moulitsas write that the top liberal blogs grow at a geometric rate, and that, "by late November 2005, the top seventy or so liberal blogs, led by Daily Kos, garnered about 60 million pageviews every month." In *Blog*, his book on the phenomenon, the right-wing blogger Hugh Hewitt writes that "Kos gets 1.6 million—that's million—visitors a month."



AP Photo / Jae C. Hong

Barbara Boxer at YearlyKos

For blogs, those are large numbers. For politics, however, they are small. Assuming there are 1 million regular readers of Daily Kos throughout America, that is still only 1/280th of the population—and only 1/59th of the number of people who voted for John Kerry in the last election. It is a tiny fraction of the American electorate.

It is also an increasingly influential tiny fraction, for two reasons. The first is money. The bloggers emerged as a force in the Democratic party right around the time that the McCain-Feingold campaign finance regulations went into effect, limiting the political parties' ability to raise large sums of money for "party building." This deprived the Democrats, in particular, of millions of dollars. Historically, the Republican party has had a large base of small donors from which it can solicit funds. The Democrats haven't. In 2003, at the start of the presidential fundraising cycle, they needed one to emerge quickly.

One did. "Once the [McCain-Feingold] bill became law," Armstrong and Moulitsas write, "it upended the established order of the political world. But no one saw it coming. Not until an unknown governor from an obscure New England state burst onto the national scene." The rise of Howard Dean, for whom both Armstrong and Moulitsas consulted, demonstrated that the Internet could act as an online ATM for the Democratic party, taking in small-dollar contributions with the click of a button. According to Armstrong and Moulitsas, Dean raised $50 million "with an average contribution of about $70." Dean lost the nomination fight, but his fundraising strategy was successful enough that the Kerry campaign quickly adopted it.

However, one could say that ultimately Dean was the victor—which brings us to the other reason the Democratic bloggers have influence. The ferocity, and popularity, of Dean's antiwar politics shifted the debate among Democrats, arguably forcing Kerry to vote against the $87 billion for reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003. This vote was a triumph for the Deaniacs and the left-wing bloggers, even though it may have cost Kerry the election, as it gave rise to his much-mocked explanation: "I actually did vote for the $87 million before I voted against it."

And there was another way in which Dean won. After Election Day, Kerry returned to the Senate, where he's moved further to the left, meanwhile plotting his return to the presidential arena. Yet Dean is currently—alongside Pelosi and Reid—a part of the triumvirate leading the Democratic party. In their book, Armstrong and Moulitsas wax poetic when the subject turns to February 12, 2005, the day Dean became DNC chairman, ensuring the former governor a place in national politics until at least 2009, and probably beyond. What's more, Armstrong and Moulitsas—and the "netroots" at large—take partial credit for Dean's rise. "Dean being chairman would not have happened without this space," the blogger and economist Stirling Newberry told me.

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No one knows, of course, exactly what role the bloggers played in Dean's rise to party chair. But, as Gloria Totten, the executive director of Progressive Majority, a liberal activist group, said at YearlyKos, "Perception in politics is reality." For the bloggers, perception is enough. And this is why the conventional metrics used to evaluate Moulitsas's political effectiveness are off. In most profiles of Moulitsas, mention is made of the more than $500,000 he raised online for more than a dozen candidates in the 2004 cycle. ("The number was actually over $1 million," Moulitsas has claimed on his website.) All of them lost. Typically, this is interpreted as a sign that association with the left-wing bloggers is a sure way to lose an election.

But that's not always true. For every example of a "netroots" candidate tumbling to defeat—Dean's loss in the 2004 Democratic presidential primary, Iraq war veteran Paul Hackett's loss to Republican Jean Schmidt in a 2005 special election in Ohio, former congressman Ciro Rodriguez's loss to Bush ally and fellow Democrat Rep. Henry Cuellar in the March 2006 Texas primary—there are races where bloggers claim victory.

In 2004, there was Barack Obama's primary victory, Rep. Ben Chandler of Kentucky's special election victory, and Rep. Stephanie Herseth of South Dakota's special election victory. In 2005, there was Chairman Dean. And so far in 2006, there is Jon Tester, a Montana state senator and Moulitsas favorite, who won the Democratic primary to challenge embattled U.S. senator Conrad Burns, and the Vietnam war veteran, author, and former Republican Jim Webb, who won the Virginia Democratic primary to challenge U.S senator George Allen.

It is not a condemnation of Moulitsas or his readership to say that, should the Democrats win a substantial victory in November 2006, they will promptly take credit for it.

Visit Daily Kos or any of the other top liberal blogs, and you are struck by the rhetoric, which is heated and more often than not profane, and the partisanship, which is unyielding. Visit YearlyKos or any other gathering of liberal bloggers, however, and you are struck by the fact that most of the authors of such blogs are personable, polite, articulate, intelligent, well-read, and humorous. I spoke to more than half a dozen bloggers, Democratic apparatchiks, and hangers-on while at YearlyKos, and each was welcoming and eager to chat.

Moulitsas likes to say that the average Daily Kos reader is 45 years old, which a cursory glance at the attendees at YearlyKos seemed to confirm. But there were plenty of twenty- and thirtysomethings here, too, young people in college or just entering the workforce. Most everyone had a college degree, and most everyone was well-dressed. From what I could tell, there were few members of the antiglobalization movement, which for much of the world is the locus of lefty politics.

In fact, rather than a convention of the "losers" of the global economy, YearlyKos was attended, for the most part, by the "winners." Newberry, the economist, described the bloggers as "meritocrats." More than half the people I met had a background in, or are actively working in, the technology sector. Many of the others are in education, or they are political professionals, here to harness the bloggers for partisan ends.

In 2005, the Pew Foundation released a demographic survey of Howard Dean supporters. The Deaniacs, it turned out, were overwhelmingly white, well-educated, well-off, and between 45 and 64 years old. In 2006, Blogads, an Internet company, conducted its own survey of progressive bloggers. The data sets are almost a complete match. Statistically, it's the same demographic, more or less. Thus it was somewhat discomfiting when, on the third day of the conference, Howard Dean told the crowd,

> This is a movement that is not so different from the movement in the Sixties, to take back America to a better place, or bring America to a better place than where it was. In the Sixties, what we fought for was individual rights, equal rights under the law for every single American, and we are still fighting for those things today, but we have lost our way starting in 1980, when the ME party took over from the WE party.

Not quite. To a great extent, Dean was addressing the *same* movement.

What the bloggers share with the Deaniacs, and what the Deaniacs shared with the supporters of the late Eugene McCarthy, is an almost religious conception of their participation in a movement. For those I spoke to, "community" was what mattered most. Readers of Daily Kos and other left-wing blogs feel under attack—besieged by the Republican party and the conservative movement and, most of all, the Religious Right. And so they turn to others who think as they do. One of the featured authors at YearlyKos, John Javna, told me, "A lot of the energy comes from people knowing that they're not alone."

On the first morning of the conference, I met Jonathan, a Mormon from Utah with a background in computer science. He began to read liberal blogs after the 2004 election. He felt distraught at Bush's reelection.

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Reading blogs, he said, was "therapy." Jonathan was sitting next to Mark, a computer science teacher from Pennsylvania, who said that the web provided him with an "alternative community," somewhere he could go to escape the Fox News Channel.

Three days later, in her closing remarks, conference organizer Cooper said the true achievement of YearlyKos was organizing a festival where progressives could go and "find friends." Cooper then told the story of "momster," a grandmother who had never written a blog before YearlyKos, but had started a Daily Kos "diary" with the help of her new acquaintances. "Moving to a Red State from the Bay Area 5 years ago was such a culture shock I nearly lost it," momster wrote in her first diary entry, "but [I] was saved by reading blogs on a daily basis, saving my sanity."

This emphasis on community—and this pervasive sense of loneliness—was also present in the after-action reports written about YearlyKos. On June 13, the blogger "dcnative" wrote:

> I thought I was losing my mind after the last election. Bush won, Kerry lost—though all the exit polls argued the other way. That week, I lost my religion at a meditation retreat.
>
> That was one piece of the bookend. That was the loss. The other side of the bookend is YearlyKos. I think I finally got some mojo.

Later, the blogger continued, "I'd never felt the love of community you were supposed to feel in a parish or a sangha, but I felt it this weekend at YearlyKos. Who are you people and where have you been all my life? Can I be in love with a thousand?"

Also on June 13, the blogger Jeffrey Feldman, posting on Daily Kos, wrote, "The attendees at YearlyKos were not just happy to put names with faces, but were deeply moved to be for the first time standing in a new community built entirely on trust."

Feldman went on, "At many points in the course of the YearlyKos convention, I found myself literally choked up with emotion, looking around me to see the room filled with tears of emotion." That same day, the blogger DarkSyde posted something written on the plane home from Las Vegas. In the post, DarkSyde wrote of a "wonderful, warm lady and YK volunteer" named "Shanna," who

> broke down crying while she was trying to convey to a small room of people just how much it meant to her to be *allowed* to work like a dog for no pay and little recognition. . . . If this is selling out, then I want to be bought.

These are the shocktroops of the People Power Movement.

But what do the shocktroops actually believe? It was difficult to find commonalities among all the bloggers at YearlyKos. Most opposed the Iraq war, and most viewed orthodox religion with suspicion. In the bloggers' view, the GOP is a party of "theocons" who want to impose a version of conservative Christianity on unbelievers. This sentiment is nothing new. Once, Moulitsas wrote on his website: "Let's not forget that ultimately, Osama's vision for the Arab world is far more akin to the Right's vision of America." Paul Hackett, the failed House candidate, once said, "The Republican party has been hijacked by the religious fanatics that, in my opinion, aren't a whole lot different than Osama bin Laden."

"Megachurches are a very scary thing," John Javna told me. In the conference's exhibition hall, a man from *carryabigsticker.com* sold bumperstickers. One featured a purported quote from Gandhi: "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ." Another featured the iconographic "Hooded prisoner" from Abu Ghraib next to the slogan, "Who Would Jesus Torture?" During his keynote speech on the final day of the conference, Mark Warner told the crowd, "Heck, it's 2006, and some of these folks are trying to re-debate evolution."

The flip side to this suspicion of orthodox religion is a fetishization of science and technology. "We should be the party of science," Gov. Richardson said. "We should be the party of space. I'm for space." One of the most heavily attended panels at YearlyKos was called "Championing Science" and dealt with alleged Republican attempts to undermine the Enlightenment. The keynote speaker on the science panel was General Clark, who bravely told the audience, "Science is one of the things that's near and dear to my heart."

"What worries me," Clark said, "is the conflict out there between faith and reason, faith and science." He gave a rambling speech. He told a long, involved story about his participation in a "radiation project" while a young man in Arkansas; tackled cosmology ("Apparently, there are many, many universes. And we're in this one"); listed American inventors from Franklin to Ford; namedropped Copernicus, Aristotle, and Aquinas; gave the Newtonian formula for gravity; spelled out Pi to about the fifth numeral; and quoted the speed of light. The audience loved every minute.

Clark was playing to the audience's conception of its own intelligence. This is one of his political gifts, and one of the reasons he is so popular among the netroots. In some sense, the YearlyKos conference was an exercise in social differentiation, a way to say, *I am not that*, whether *that* is a religious nut who votes conservative or

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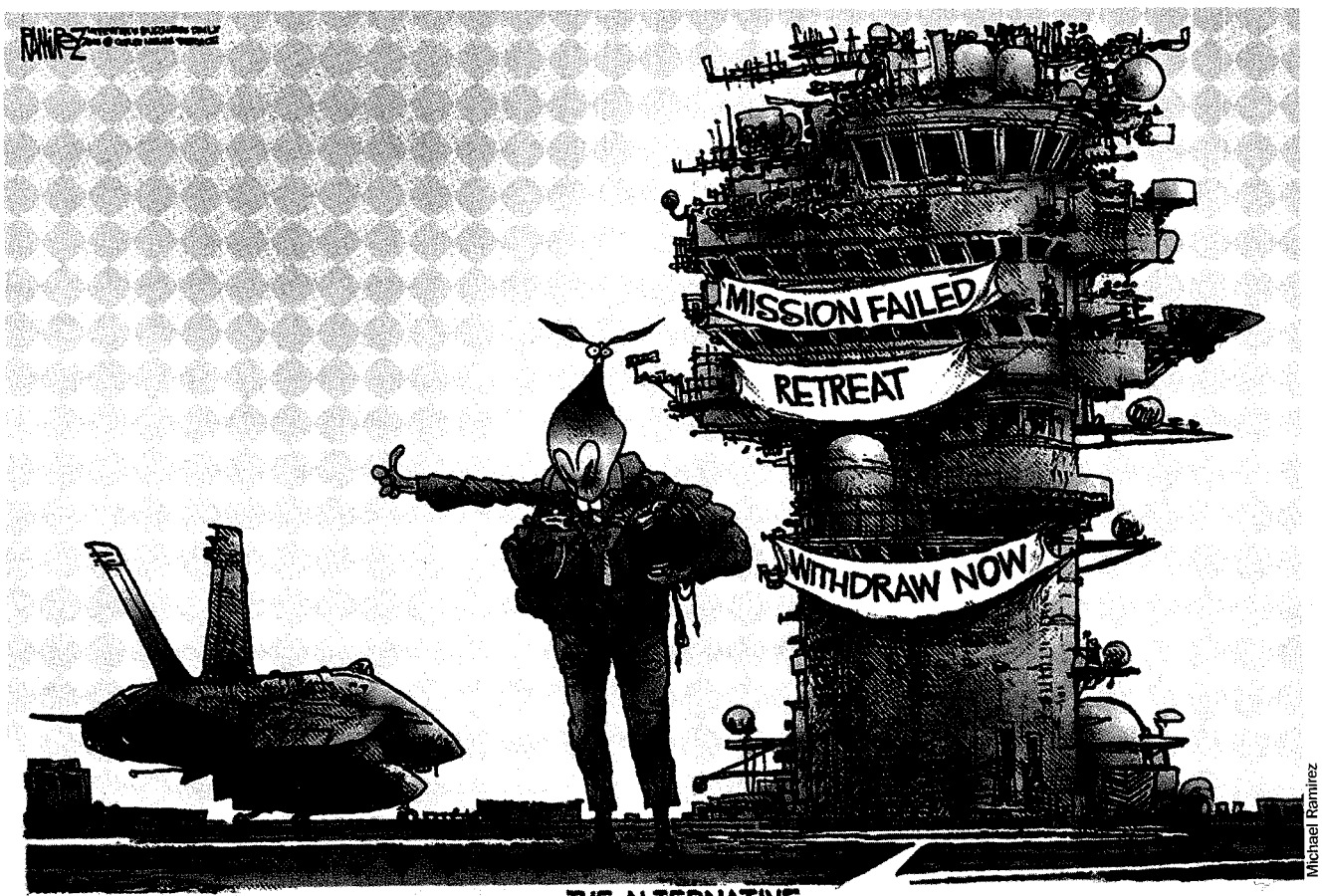
a neocon warmonger. For many attendees, the answers to all political questions were self-evident. While the politicians were working to tap a new source of campaign money, the bloggers, it seemed, cared more about being with people who agreed with them and dreaming of future Democratic victories. At the moment, the netroots is a political movement with only the fuzziest ideology.

Just listen to its founders. "I'm not ideological at all," Moulitsas once told the *Washington Monthly*'s Benjamin Wallace-Wells. "I'm just all about winning." In *Crashing the Gate*, Armstrong and Moulitsas write, "It's not an ideological movement—there is actually very little, issue-wise, that unites more modern party activists except, perhaps, opposition to the Iraq War . . ."

And yet, if Armstrong and Moulitsas are correct, their movement is not a substantive engagement with the issues facing the country. It eschews serious persuasive argument in favor of coalition-building. And this coalition is unconcerned with convincing anyone beyond its borders.

The activists say they take their cues from the right, which, in their view, gave up short-term political victories in favor of a generational march toward partisan realignment. So, while the netroots build their coalition and bide their time, they are content to let what they call the "Democratic establishment"—the Democrats who aim to govern beyond the echo chamber—suffer defeat. At a moment when Democratic candidates face close races almost everywhere in the country, one of the party's most influential constituencies is looking only for politicians who emote, who oppose, who rail against Bush, the GOP, and the war.

That is why Howard Dean is still the standard-bearer of Internet politics. That is why, as Peter Beinart has noted, Moulitsas is dead-set on defeating Joe Lieberman, who represents a politics of reasonable compromise, in Connecticut's Democratic Senate primary. And that is why Hillary Clinton was roundly booed when she told the audience at last week's Take Back America conference—an annual gathering of liberal activists, including some YearlyKos attendees—that she opposed a timetable for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. She allowed herself to admit that sometimes the other side can be right. ♦



Michael Ramirez

THE ALTERNATIVE

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Riding with the Kossacks

Markos Moulitsas Zúniga and me

By Matt Labash

Las Vegas

Whoa! Did you just feel that? Did you just feel the earth stop spinning on its axis, then reverse its rotation? Did you feel the moon enter into its Seventh House, and Jupiter align with Mars? Did you feel Jesus stomp off in a snit, as He was replaced at the right hand of God by Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, aka Kos? As in the eponymous blog Daily Kos? As in the four-year-old progressive website that is galvanizing the netroots and igniting the People Powered Movement? As in the site that is reshaping the political landscape, uprooting the old order, and, in Kos's words, relegating those who'd stand in the movement's way "to the dustbin of history"? Oh—and which is also a place where people blog about themselves?

Well if you didn't feel that, it's probably because you weren't at the Riviera Hotel here on June 8-11, for the first YearlyKos convention. Not to rub it in, but you missed out. Not to brag, but I was there. Sure, there were times throughout the proceedings when I wished I was elsewhere. Maybe during some of the jibber-jabbery panels and roundtables and caucuses and workshops. Maybe during the "Sustainable Energy—Energize America" panel with Gov. Bill Richardson. I mean no offense, Bill. Maybe America does need other kinds of energy besides People Power. But do I really want to sit around a dingy conference room talking about renewable fuels when I'm in Sin City?

Maybe I'd have liked to be at the blackjack tables, or to see a Danny Gans show, or to hang out at the Palms Hotel pool where all the women have brand-new breasts and all the meatheads keep feeling their triceps every few minutes to make sure they haven't shrunk since the last inspection. Maybe there were panels that made me cry out for my mom, like "MetaKos," moderated by Kos, which caused blogger Skippy The Bush Kangaroo to describe his dispatch from the conference as "blogging about people talking about people blogging about blogs. Did your head explode yet?" Maybe I yearned to be down the street at Gilley's at the Frontier casino, which promises "Cold Beer, Dirty Girls, Mud Wrestling Live, Bikini Bull Riding." I mean, after all, we People-Powered types cannot live on Kos alone.

But I stayed at YearlyKos, and I stayed because I had a little laminated rectangle around my neck that said "YearlyKos Convention," but which might as well have read "Press Pass to History." Because if you'd had ringsiders to watch Hammurabi inscribe his Code in black diorite, or Luther tack his 95 Theses to the door in Wittenberg, you wouldn't have played hookie at the Frontier, watching dirty girls mud wrestle bull riders.

No sir, you'd watch history get made. Because before history becomes history, it has to be a moment in time. And if I could cast the convention into song, I might very well make it Whitney Houston's "One Moment in Time." Or maybe one of Kos's selections, since he's also a piano composer. Maybe his 1996 track entitled "Solipsistic Affirmations." Either Whitney Houston or Kos—maybe I'd have Whitney Houston sing, with Kos accompanying her on piano.

You could read about this history being made, too. But not in some jive, dead-tree history book. I read about it in real-time pixels—what we in the People-Powered community call "live blogging." It means blogging something as it's happening, rather than after it happens—or even before it happens, which one blogger told me is called "predictive blogging." I read about the history that was being made in all-star blogger SusanG's Daily Kos diary. She wrote it in the middle of the convention, in a post she entitled "Yearly Kos: The Magic of People Power Made Manifest."

"We are hungry," she wrote, "hungry for each other in person." Easy, SusanG, the World's Fare Buffet is just

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down past the Capri rooms. (Sorry, we netroots types like to kid each other.) She went on to call it "pure magic," saying, "We are here. We are at the gates. We will no longer remain passive and meek in order to court favor. We, the people, are coming to power slowly and indefatigably, here in Vegas, and here on the blog. We have arrived."

And they have, too, as evidenced by the massive media turnout. There were tons of them. You couldn't tell where the netroots ended and the media began. Sometimes, if you were a journalist, and you were trying to interview someone in the hall, you'd have to first give them the once over to see if their netroots were showing. Otherwise, you might end up accidentally interviewing Maureen Dowd. It's like SusanG wrote: "It seems like every fourth person you run into is here covering the phenomenon of . . . us. We're worth it, too. We are something else."

You tell them, SusanG. You tell them why the politicians from Barbara Boxer to Wes Clark are turning the Riviera into a giant kissing booth. You tell them why prospective Democratic presidential candidate Mark Warner rented out the observation tower of the Stratosphere Hotel to toast you with sushi and "Kosmopolitans" and chocolate fountains and Blues Brothers and Elvis impersonators and laptop-shaped ice sculptures. You tell them why the *New York Times* sent six people and THE WEEKLY STANDARD sent two (flood the zone!). Never mind SusanG, I'll tell them. I'll tell them that it's because the Kossacks, as they call themselves, are happening now. They are so of the moment that a moment ago, when I wrote that they were happening now, I was sort of predictive blogging. But that was then, this is now. So don't blink or you'll miss it, because it's happening.

Okay, not all of them are happening now. Not all the ones wearing Howard Dean T-shirts, for instance. Not all the ones hanging on former Dean *consigliere* Joe Trippi's every word in the "Using the Blogosphere Workshop." Not all the ones who are memorizing the Democracy For America handout, which contains tips from Zephyr Teachout, Dean's former online guru, who dispenses advice like "Draft drunk, edit sober" and "People like stories and poems and songs—they like DJ's—you're the DJ for this effort." These people were happening now about three years ago. They're yesterday's now. But now, they're ready to be today's now.

Don't misunderstand—the thousand or so conferees aren't all Deaniacs. A lot of them are just good, honest-to-God activist bloggers who like their politics progressive and their sandals with low heels. Now, see, that was a stereotype. And Kos warns the Kossacks about stereotypes. He's always getting stereotyped, in fact. The media are always trying to turn him into the leader of some creepy cult, because the media are unfair to Kossacks. Just like they are to the Moonies and the Scientologists.

Kos doesn't even like being the L. Ron Hubbard of the progressive blogosphere, which everybody just assumes he is because it's his face front and center in a Ned Lamont Democratic primary commercial against Joe Lieberman, or because he term-limits his all-star bloggers (or "frontpagers"), or because it's his name on the website, and the conference, and the tote bags, and the beanies, and the hoodies, and the organic sustainable cotton T-shirts.

I mean, sure, some cynics—I didn't meet any at YearlyKos, but I'm sure they're out there—would say this is a hype, like Internet IPOs or Vanilla Coke or Ross Perot. There are guys like DAILY STANDARD contributor Dean Barnett who've reported that Daily Kos, which everybody assumes is growing by leaps and bounds, actually went from 23 million visitors in one month last fall to 16 million in May. There's evidence like the recent Gallup poll which shows that blog reader growth was "somewhere between nil and negative in the past year," that reading blogs ranks at the bottom of online activities, and that only 15 percent of the public reads blogs, even though there are over 40 million of them, meaning a lot of bloggers are talking to themselves. But Kos wants you to know this is a real, enduring movement not centered around his cult of personality. It's about non-hierarchical netroots, it's about "the volunteers." Just like it was in the Reform party, a vibrant, healthy organization that, even after Ross Perot left it, still dominates American politics to this day.

Kos doesn't even like doing media. When you see him chatting with the *New York Times* (which reported he had a media coach) or going on *Meet the Press* or doing a photo shoot in the halls of the Riviera, sure, he looks like he's kind of enjoying it. But reluctantly. He said as much on his blog the other day. He said, "The media glare is not something I crave." And I think he means it. After all, he said it in a diary entry that was facetiously titled "It's all about me." It was 1,100 words long, painstakingly analyzed his media coverage, and was all about him.

But that's the media for you. Unfair, unbalanced, and afraid of their own obsolescence. Because that's what the dead-tree media do. They have their stories written before they get off the plane. They need to fit your round peg into their square hole, if I may work blue since we're here in Vegas. Take the Kossacks, for instance. I mean yeah okay, they're bloggers. They live and die by the blog. They blogged in between panels and during panels

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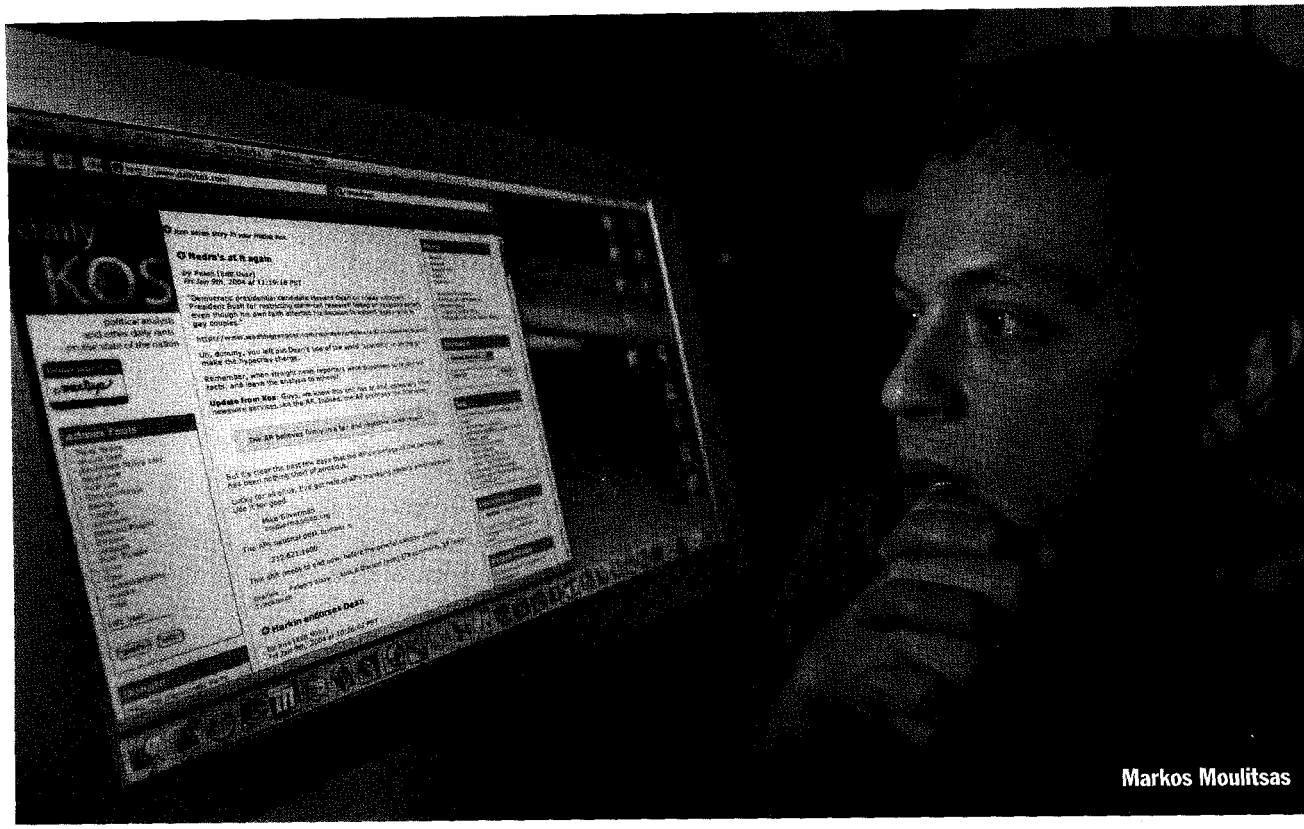

Markos Moulitsas

San Francisco Chronicle / Corbis / Frederic Larson

and some even while they were moderating panels. The hallways were clotted with people sitting on the floor, click-clacking laptops in a blogging bacchanal. They were blogging every which way: one-handed blogging, blogging their brains out, blogging from behind.

But other than that, the stereotypes don't hold. "What is amazing about us in the flesh is our diversity," wrote SusanG. And she's right, it's evident. Like at Pastor Dan's Interfaith Service on Sunday morning, which featured "greetings from faith traditions." They had a Christian, a Jew, a Buddhist, a pagan, a Unitarian, and an atheist. And it wasn't the setup to a joke! They didn't walk into a bar or anything! An atheist! At an inter*faith* service! That's diversity!

I mean, sure, almost everyone at the conference was white. But they were different shades of white. Some were conference-room clammy white. Others were liquid-crystal-display blue-ish white. But there were both white men, and white women. Loads of 'em. And they weren't all 19 years old and wearing pajamas and fresh from *Dungeons and Dragons* matches in their mothers' basements. The average age looked to be about 40-45. These are people with lives and families and jobs, even if some of those jobs have titles like "pro bono philosopher."

And after moving among the netroots for three and a half days, I can say with some confidence that they're not *Dungeons and Dragons* players. That's so '80s, and so unfair. They're better than that. They're more *World of Warcraft* types, the kind of Night Elves who aren't afraid to descend the holy mountain of Hyjal to wield their mystical powers in the fight for the survival of Azeroth. So much for stereotypes.

Sometimes the only way to get around the media is to go through them. That can be hard for bloggers. Take away their narcissism, their lust for attention, and their ravenous appetite for self-congratulation (Daily Kos's Hunter recently wrote about the "absolute brilliance of some of the voices we've got as leading lights of the progressive blogosphere") and they're a meek lot. Many of them have faces made for the blogosphere. Still, their public is calling. "I'd rather not be on TV, but I don't think I can avoid it," said one blogger.

So it was good to see the netroots get forced out of their blogger shells at the Pundit Project Training, which was run by the Center for American Progress and led by (Name Redacted) and (Name Redacted). As I came into the room and took a seat next to *National Review*'s Byron York (or, as some of the conventioneers liked to call us, "The Enemy"), a volunteer came over and told us that we really shouldn't even be in the workshop, but that if we stayed, we couldn't use names or quotes or descrip-

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tions or any of the things that the corporate media like to use for those things they do called "stories."

We talked (Gender Redacted) out of it, for the most part, until this nameless, sexless person agreed that we could quote people and describe them, just not use names or identifiers. Because that's what the netroots are about, ultimately. They're about transparency, about honesty, about going on background instead of off the record.

It can be easy to forget in the middle of a People Powered Movement, a revolution if you will, that sometimes the revolution will be televised. And not just on *youtube.com* or your grubby little website either. Sometimes, you need to go on Chris Matthews and knock a few heads. And when you do, there are things you should know, according to the workshop handout.

You should ask the booker, "Will it be acceptable to interrupt the host?" Never get angry or strident—that's a tough one for the netroots. Guys, blue shirts look best, and accept makeup if the studio offers it. Ladies, don't dress like Ann Coulter. Cover up for God's sake, preferably with a neutral-colored jacket and a bright shirt.

When the bloggers take turns role-playing on camera, they seem almost apologetic about their bloggerishness. "I have dimples, you can't see them—I have so much facial hair," says one. But the workshop wasn't just about constructive criticism: Smile, keep your hands out of the box, look at the camera, not the monitor. It was also about constructive celebration, celebrating oneself, one's own netrootedness, one's own bloggerhood.

After going two or three minutes without hearing bloggers praised as a species, one blogger in blogger glasses asks the trainers if there's anything that bloggers naturally do right that "attracts producers to them." Yes, say the trainers. It turns out bloggers become experts on everything, they are not afraid to "speak directly." Also, they tend not to be evasive and are generally comfortable with conflict. Also, they're truth-tellers. Also, says one trainer, they have "the irreverence, the wit, the research, and a certain kind of attitude that is greatly needed on the progressive side." It's important, therefore, for them to be who they are. "You're like the new cool kids on the block," says one trainer. "You should leverage that."

It is a pretty heady time for bloggers. Take Ellie Perelli, a 78-year-old woman who used to be a "lurker" (a reader only) but who has become a full-fledged Kossack, having just posted her first diary under "momster." She's now an unofficial mascot of the site. Ellie didn't even know how to blog. But shortly after our Mother Talkers Caucus the other day, headed by Kos's wife who runs *mothertalkers.com*, a website featuring "rants and raves on modern motherhood," a woman named Shannon "took me upstairs and showed me how to do it." I ask Ellie what it felt like to blog for the first time, upstairs with Shannon. She laughs naughtily. "Satisfying," she says. "Exciting. Like I just opened a Christmas present and it was everything you wished for."

In these circles, there's lots of pressure to blog, to say something, anything, and to say it loudly and often. Take my new friend Alex Barrio, whom I met when he headed the Student Caucus I attended. He called the meeting to order by saying, "Before we get started, let's all grab the hand of the person next to you." Then he said he was just kidding—he was trying to scare the reporter. I wanted to hug him at that moment. I've been to lots of these gatherings over the years, and holding hands is some of the lighter physical contact I've been asked to participate in.

One day, in the hallway, Alex offers a confession: "I've read the blogs. But I'm a lurker." He says this with some shame, as if he's just admitted that he hands out porn at preschool bus stops. He's decided, however, that it's time to get more directly involved, so he registered as a user with Daily Kos. He's immediately allowed to comment on other people's diaries, but there's a one-week waiting period before he can write a diary of his own. (It's kind of like buying a handgun.) So instead, he borrows the handle of Luke McSweeney, a 28-year-old nuclear safety engineer who posts under "Cream Puff."

We take a seat at a table near the registration desk, and Alex agrees to let me watch him get his blog cherry popped. He pulls some notes he's scrawled out of a pocket, and focuses on the screen before him with laser-like intensity. He is oblivious to noise and the color commentary I'm providing to my tape recorder.

He is uninterested when Jodi Leib, an attractive woman from my Abortion Roundtable meeting, stops by to bend my ear about how we need to "create healthy sexual attitudes" and about how men need to "love their sperm, love their bodies." He doesn't pay any mind when she shares with me the lyrics to a song she wrote, "Love is Mystical": *Love, love, love / All our love is mystical / Love, love, love / Sexual is mystical.* "Love your sperm!" I say to Alex, trying to get him to join in the love-fest. "I'm looking forward to my vasectomy," he says, without looking away from the computer.

Alex has some unfinished thoughts about the need for more students at the Student Caucus, and he's got to get them out. He is a student at the University of Central Florida, but it seems like he was one of the only students in his caucus. The rest were pros from places like the DNC and the Progressive Patriots Fund, trolling for young voters like online predators, because they've heard the kids are really hep to this thing called the Information Superhighway.

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Alex is no top-of-the-brainpan blowhard. He labors. He crafts. He edits and reedits and then passes the computer to Cream Puff and another friend who blogs under "Shlomo Boudreaux, the Cajun Jew" for more copy-editing. "What are you going to title it?" I ask Alex. "Student caucus," he says. "Doesn't exactly grab you by the lapels. Doesn't say 'revolution,'" I helpfully offer, being in the words business myself. He goes instead with "YearlyKos Student Caucus—Students needed!" Much better.

He hits "send," we sit and intently watch the feedback line as if we are waiting for a red light to change. It says "0 comments." Sometimes that big donut just lies there and mocks you, makes you feel as though you're spitting in the wind, as if your voice isn't being heard. But then it changes to "1 comment." It's from "jlove1982," who says she would've loved to have "networked with people" and that hopefully next year's convention will be "somewhere closer to the east coast. But good work." Success! Validation! People Power!

But all the Kossacks aren't as deliberative or scrupulous as Alex. Take Pontificator. I don't know him, but I've read his work online. He recently did a predictive blog about a subject I know a little something about—me. He wrote about my piece, this piece, a week before it came out. His diary was entitled "Prepare for the Matt Labash YearlyKos Hatchet Job Article."

That hurts, Pontificator. Why do you have to prejudge? Hear me now, Pontificator, if that's your real name: WORDS CAN WOUND. He and the 69 commenters on his post purported to know everything about my piece, along with my comings and goings at the convention, without knowing much of anything. They didn't know that I get it. That I understand it. That I plug into People Power. That I, too, am People and have Power within me.

But how would Pontificator know that? He just posts from his digital echo chamber. He called me "that scowling unshaven frat boy some of you may have seen skulking around the convention grounds." Not true, you lying sack of pontification. I wasn't skulking, I was practically skipping, as you would if you were headed to the "Hot Topic of the Day featuring a panel of top bloggers" discussion. Plus, I was never in a frat. Plus, I shaved every single morning with my Schick Quattro, which is designed "for the guy who wants everything . . . except irritation."

The commenters were even worse. Circle said that I "smelled like judgment." No I didn't, I smelled like Acqua Di Parma, a symbol of Italian elegance favored by Humphrey Bogart and Cary Grant. Shayera said that I was sitting at her table at the Valerie Plame panel, that I got up in the middle and left for 20 minutes, returning with a *USA Today* that I read for the rest of the panel. "I saw that too," wrote Buzzer. "What a f—ing jerk," said Sally in SF. Except for one problem: I was only at that panel for about 5 minutes, left, and never came back inside. Nor did I ever have a *USA Today*. Must've been a different Matt Labash from THE WEEKLY STANDARD. Hey, Shayera, good thing the blogosphere is here to check our facts.

Then there were the buttercups from my Abortion Roundtable. They practically stoned me after forcing me to admit I was pro-life. Some were rude enough that other people at the roundtable later apologized to me on their behalf. But somehow, I was the jerk for answering their questions. In a comment, Elise called me a "jackass" and said I "coughed rudely throughout the discussion (without covering his mouth!)."

Faboo claimed I threw a "tantrum about not being able to record the abortion roundtable." But nothing remotely close to that ever happened. I never asked to record, I was never asked not to record, and I did in fact record. Annrose, who runs *abortionclinicsonline.com*, and who moderated the roundtable, says I "blushed in that slimy way" when I was asked if I always use contraception when I don't want to procreate, and that I couldn't say yes. Actually, after stammering because of the presumptuousness of the question, I did say yes. The reason I was blushing, Annrose, is that you told me I was "too cute to be pro-life." Twice. (Call me, Sweet Cheeks.)

To be fair, the commenters reacting to Pontificator's post did get around to more important topics, like Byron York's cellphone. "For the record, Byron York's cellphone rang during the Plame panel," said QuickSilver. Shayera said it rang either "two or three times. And I'm sure about that." QuickSilver just had to know if York checked his caller ID before he answered it. He did, says Shayera of the man she called Byron "big hair" York. "I was two tables back and to the right, so I had a perfect view."

QuickSilver, Shayera, we salute your reporting. Stellar stuff. Thanks for showing us the way. Thanks for not just working it out in workshop, where the words disappear into the ether. But for putting it down, in black and white, where it can be read forever by the netroots, who need something to read while "Crashing the Gate," as Kos put it. And we can talk about this and so much else on Daily Kos. About the netroots and People Power and Byron York's Byronic locks and cellphone habits. And we can talk, and talk, and talk some more, even when we've run out of things to say. ♦

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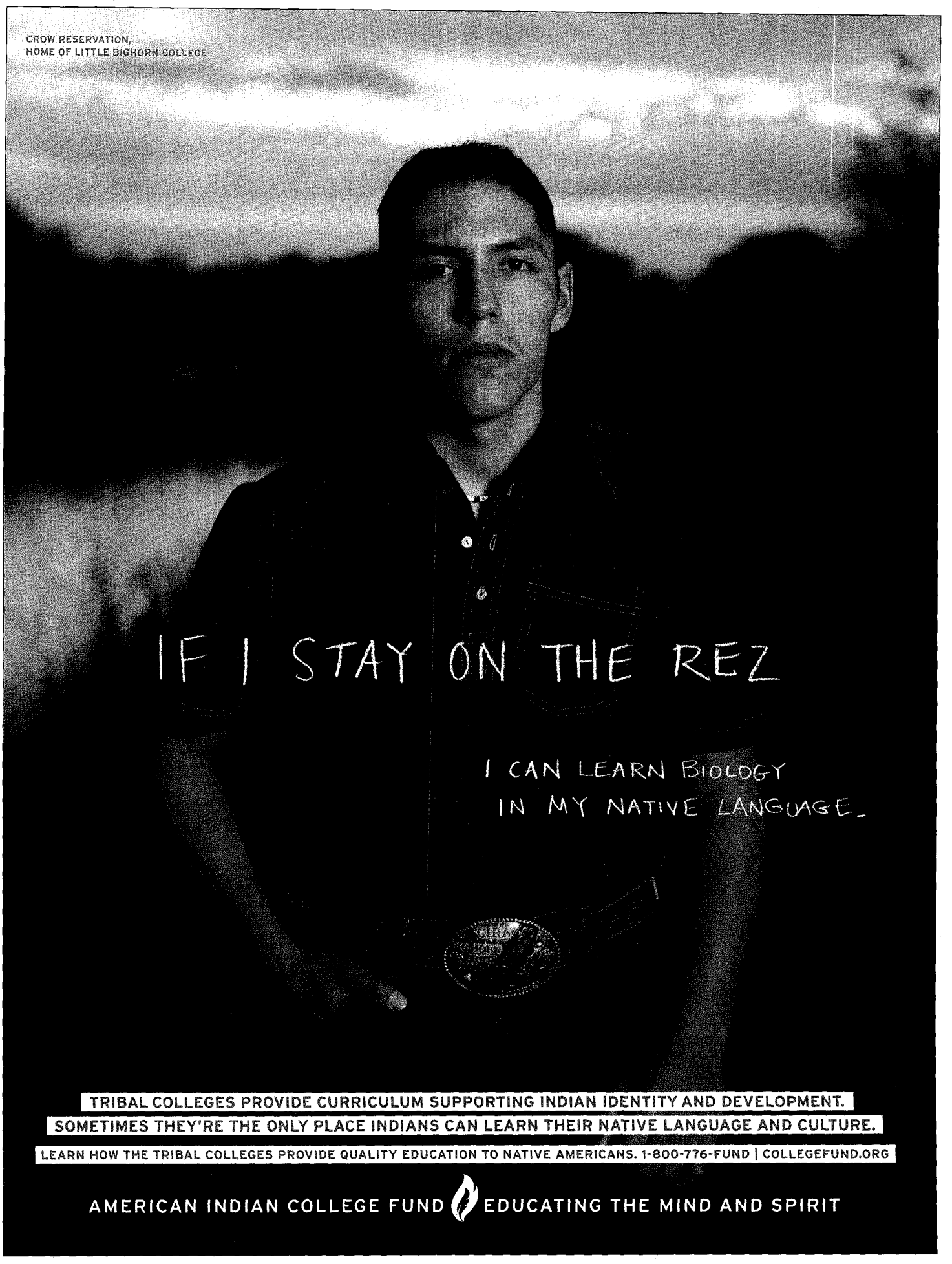

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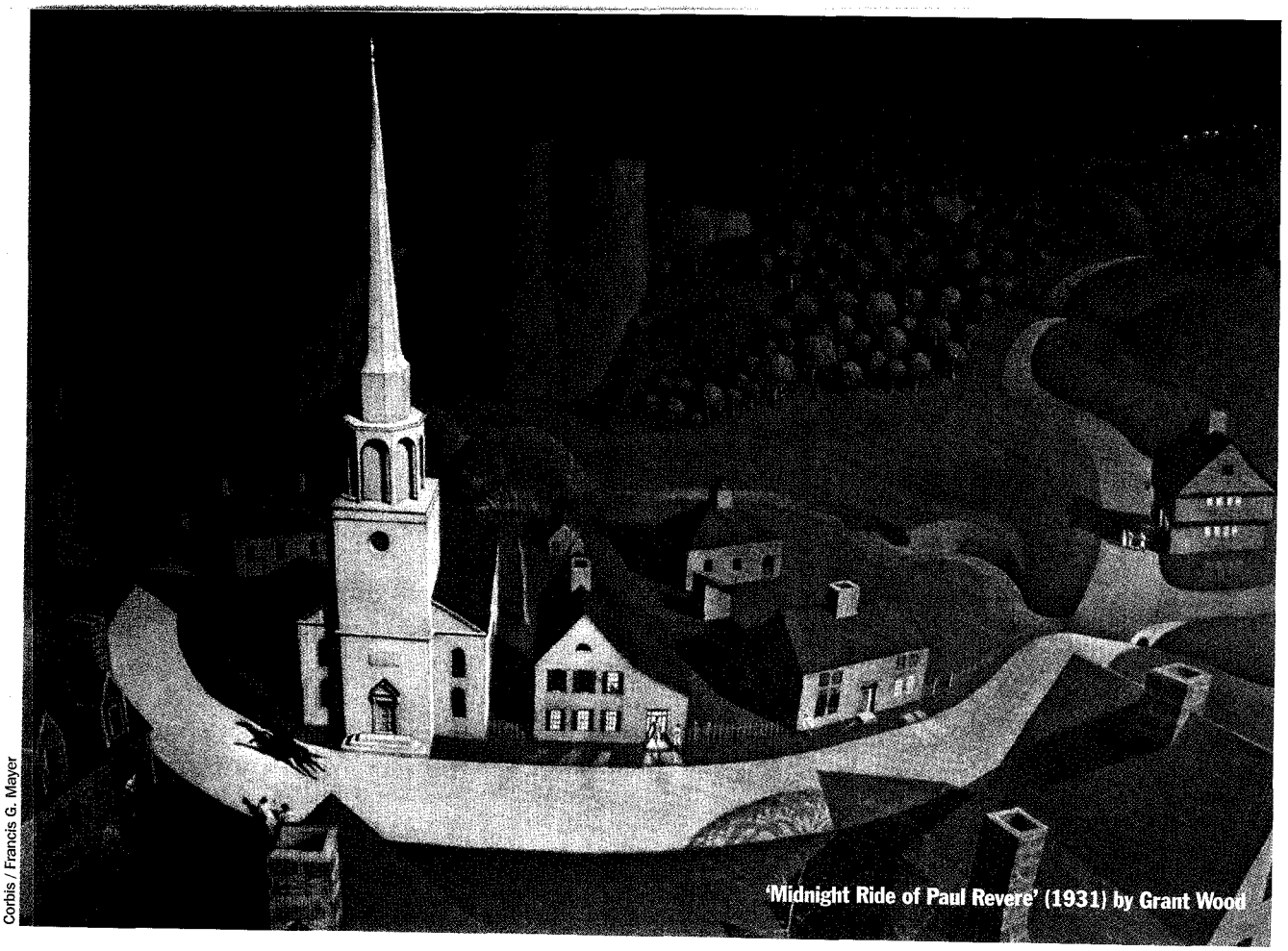

Corbis / Francis G. Mayer

'Midnight Ride of Paul Revere' (1931) by Grant Wood

America the Beautiful

Our country in the eyes of William Bennett

BY PATRICK ALLITT

Next time you're driving across the United States, glance up after the first 2,000 miles and you'll see, side-by-side, Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt on Mount Rushmore. Then pick up William J. Bennett's *America*; you'll be struck by how nearly he echoes sculptor Gutzon Borglum's judgment that they were the four greatest Americans in history, deserving of the biggest possible form of recognition.

Most historians want to say something new about the past. Bennett, in this first volume of his popular history of the United States, wants to repeat a lot of old things about it. Too much recent historical writing, he says, has been corrosive, unpatriotic, badly written, and cold. He wants it to be warm, readable, and nostalgic, and he wants it to "kindle romance, to encourage Americans to fall in love with this country, again or for the first time." Let citizens relearn their heroic heritage; let them take pride in George Washington's flinty determination and feel grateful for Lincoln's sacrifice; and let them understand that America is the last best hope of Earth.

America: The Last Best Hope
Vol. I: From the Age of Discovery to a World at War
by William J. Bennett
Nelson Current, 544 pp., $29.99

All over the world, for centuries, history has served patriotism. The scientific history movement of the last century-and-a-half, however, created a rigorous method and imposed austere standards of accuracy, no matter what the cost in national self-gratification. Bennett borrows from the scientific historical tradition, synthesizing the work of such professional historians as James Flexner on Washington, David McCullough on John Adams, Stephen Ambrose on Lewis and Clark, James McPherson on the Civil War, and Edmund Morris on Theodore Roosevelt, but uses their work to instill in readers "pleasure and pride in what we have done and become." Today's jaded Americans, he says, should learn that history really does prove their nation to be uniquely privileged, an inspiration to the rest of the world.

Part history, part moral tract, *America* is an awkward hybrid. Still, on

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at least one point, Bennett is surely right: American history textbooks today are bad and boring. You would never know from most of them that Americans were ever generous, hospitable, cheerful, idealistic, inventive, or hard working. Instead they teach you, to the point of exhaustion, that American history is mostly about racist, misogynist, xenophobic, greedy philistines. In the standard school and college textbooks these days, victimization looms large, and only the victims, the powerless, have any nobility or decency. It's bracing to see Bennett redressing the balance.

Has he let the pendulum swing back a little too far? Yes. As he tells it, everything just kept getting better as the decades rolled. Sure, there were problems like slavery, but the thing to emphasize, he argues, is that everyone else had slavery, too, whereas America was among the Western nations that eventually abolished it: "One might conclude that far from being slavery's *worst* practitioners, westerners led the world to end the practice." Similarly, he says, America may have had its moments of violent nativist intolerance, and long periods of race-based immigrant exclusion, but don't forget the big picture. Overall, America's welcome to immigrants has been magnificent: "No other nation on earth has accorded to so many the blessings of liberty and opportunity."

Very occasionally, however, even the upbeat Bennett stares at a problem and admits that he sees all cloud and no silver lining. Then he gets indignant. He describes the Trail of Tears, the forced Indian removal of the 1830s, as "an indelible stain on America's reputation." Enraged a hundred years after the fact at a Southern senator's racist reaction when Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to dinner at the White House, Bennett declares: "[T]o the everlasting shame of the U.S. Senate, Tillman was *not* expelled at that instant."

Moments like these aside, Bennett will make you feel terrific about America, and he is a good storyteller. The big set pieces and the big themes of politics and war reclaim the place they used to enjoy in old narrative histories. As a man experienced in practical politics, he understands the pressures confronting national leaders, and the fact that they often make fateful decisions while possessing inadequate information. He understands, too, that some things matter more than others in a nation's history; if America had been unable to fight and win, it could neither have come into existence nor remained in existence.

His list of heroes and villains is fairly predictable, but occasionally he skewers figures other historians have revered. He treats the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison as a deluded fanatic, and the three-time Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan as a nitwit ("He had no qualifications to be secretary of state. He had no qualifications to be president either but that is another matter."). What happened to them? They were left behind by more prudent, constructive, and intelligent leaders: Frederick Douglass (for whom Bennett has a particular admiration) among antebellum abolitionists, and Woodrow Wilson among early 20th-century Democratic politicians.

Bennett ably evokes the mood and atmosphere of crises. A ragged Continental Army battles grimly against the Redcoats, makes a daring crossing of the Delaware to attack Hessian mercenaries in Trenton, and later shivers through a desperate winter at Valley Forge. George Washington reduces a crowd of mutinous officers to tears and obedience when he has to put on glasses to read them a letter from the Continental Congress: "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country." James Madison argues tenaciously, first in Philadelphia, then in Richmond, on behalf of the Constitution. The Battle of Gettysburg rages across 14 vivid pages, shown here from the general's-eye view and from that of common soldiers on both sides. Bennett then depicts Lincoln delivering his immortal speech—and includes the entire text—at the graveyard dedication.

He never misses the chance to tell a good anecdote, and he has an eye for the strange, the gruesome, and the surprising. For example, did you know that, just as Virginia was becoming a profitable tobacco plantation, King James I became the world's first anti-smoking crusader? Or that the French Jesuit missionary Isaac Jogues had to get a papal dispensation to celebrate the mass because the Mohawk Indians he tried to convert had tortured him and eaten most of his fingers? Or that Monticello was rescued from destruction in 1834 by Uriah Levy, the first Jewish commodore in the U.S. Navy, who was also the man responsible for abolishing flogging for sailors? Or that Teddy Bears are named after big-game hunter Theodore Roosevelt, after an incident in which he indignantly refused to shoot a wounded and cornered bear?

First Ladies add anecdotal color of their own. One was "Lemonade Lucy" Hayes, a temperance advocate who would not serve alcohol at the White House in the late 1870s. A disgruntled British diplomat wrote home that, at her receptions, "the water flowed like champagne."

Just as he can't resist quirks and oddities, neither can Bennett resist old nicknames; he is a heavy user. As you read about the politics of the 1840s and 1850s you'll thrill to the magnificent oratory of "the Godlike Daniel," to caustic rejoinders by "the Great Compromiser," and to the grim challenges of "the Cast-Iron Man." You'll marvel as "Old Rough and Ready" conquers Mexico, and "The Pathfinder" builds a new republic in California, watched from the District of Columbia by "Young Hickory." You'll wonder: Is a crate of "Beecher's Bibles," paid for by indignant "Barn Burners," enough to stop the "Border Ruffians" in Kansas? Will the "Fire Eaters" keep the "Doughfaces'" sympathies, and will "King Cotton" always require "the Peculiar Institution"?

Nineteenth-century Americans had a high tolerance not only for nicknames but also for doggerel. It used to be standard fare in history books, and Bennett revives it here to illustrate popular moods. He shows us the Yankee poet James Russell Lowell

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denouncing the Mexican War of 1846 as a slaveholders' ruse:

> *They just want this Californy*
> *So's to lug new slave-states in*
> *To abuse ye, an'to scorn ye,*
> *An' to plunder ye like sin.*

Abraham Lincoln suspends *habeas corpus* in Maryland at the start of the Civil War, and we get to hear the citizens' musical rejoinder:

> *The despot's heel is on thy shore, Maryland!*
> *His torch is at thy temple door, Maryland!*
> *Avenge the patriot gore*
> *That flecked the streets of Baltimore*
> *And be the battle queen of yore,*
> *Maryland, My Maryland!*

Snatches of Emerson, Thoreau, and the whole of Melville's "The Martyr"(on the death of Lincoln) enrich the book, as do vigorous polemics, insults, jokes, and barbs. When Harvard offered Andrew Jackson ("Old Hickory") an honorary degree, alumnus John Quincy Adams ("Old Man Eloquent") wrote: "I could not be present to see my darling Harvard disgrace herself by conferring a Doctor's degree upon a barbarian and savage who could scarcely spell his own name."

The grand narrative, the anecdotes, verses, and nicknames are the best part of the book. Not so good is the sometimes hectoring tone and the frequent use of italics to emphasize a point the author seems to fear you might otherwise miss. Here is a typical passage:

> Washington drove a stake through the heart of monarchy in America; if he would not be king, *nobody* could be king. And that was the end of kingship in America *forever*. America has had forty-three presidents—including some liars, "lemons," and losers—but we have never had a tyrant. For that we can thank George Washington.

The effect of the italics, surely unintentional, is to make you think that Bennett doubts readers' capacity to concentrate, or that he has decided to aim chiefly at teenagers. Teen readers probably favor this kind of portentous paragraphing, too:

> "If you see the president," Grant told a colleague, "tell him there will be no turning back." And there was no turning back.
> Not for Grant.
> Or Lincoln.
> Or the United States of America.

In fact, I know they do because I receive dozens of freshman papers every year written in this "breathless headline" idiom.

America may be the ideal American history primer for the Instant Messaging generation. Bennett moves fast, covers a lot of ground in a short space, and writes terse, matter-of-fact sentences. Impatient or ADD readers will be delighted at how quickly they can get an outline picture of the nation's history, along with a few bright illustrations. They must be more careful than he when it comes to editing their own work, however. Three times in two pages he says "principal" when he means "principle" (pp. 110-111). He writes "looses" in one footnote where he means "loses" (p. 67). Later, a star in the text promises a footnote but there is no note (p. 386).

Some paragraphs are as confusing as the ones I find in my weakest undergraduates' papers, which try to deal with several issues at once. Here's an example—surely one of the most jumbled paragraphs ever to be set in type:

> Many Americans came to have concerns about the rise of *monopoly* in the railroad industry. The first decades of development had shown that steam locomotives required single tracks, and the idea of competition over a single line of track would not work. Vast fortunes were made in railroads. Some Americans began to fear a class system based on wealth. The great disparities in wealth that characterized Europe would undermine the Jeffersonian ideal of yeoman farmers, independent and free. Soon, the railroads came to rely on long, single cars called "saloons" with an aisle running down the center. First-class tickets provided more comfortable travel.

Did a former secretary of education really write that paragraph, then reread it, and decide that it was just right? Bennett is sometimes historically inaccurate, too, as when he describes the onset of the English Civil War of the 1640s with the highly misleading claim: "Oliver Cromwell, a local landed leader, raised an army against the king." That's like saying: "Ulysses S. Grant, an ex-West Pointer, raised an army against the Confederacy."

If Bennett has cut a few corners in bringing us the good old stories, he has deferred to a long tradition of preserving the good old omissions. I'm an immigrant from Britain who may be unduly sensitive on this point, but I've always been astonished at American historians' reluctance to say anything about the huge number of people who opposed independence and fought against the Revolution. From the soberest academics to the gaudiest popularizers, there is a conspiracy of silence about the "Tories" or else (from those who do give them a sentence or two) an assumption that they acted from the worst possible motives. No one would tell the history of the Civil War without considering what the Confederates believed and why they fought, but nearly all historians neglect a large part of the other side when it comes to the Revolution.

Most historians are all but invisible to the general public. Not this one. As you read *America* it's hard not to think about William Bennett the man and his turbulent, high-profile career. He was chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, secretary of education, then "drug czar" in the Reagan-Bush administrations; constantly in the news. In the 1990s, he cried woe over what he saw as the nation's moral and cultural decline, edited a best-selling *Book of Virtues*, and attacked President Clinton, during the Lewinsky scandal, in *The Death of Outrage*. Since the turn of the millennium he has remained a visible public figure. He recently survived revelations about a lavish gambling habit and allegations of racism for his remarks about the relationship between abortions and falling crime rates.

America is not politically heavy-handed, except for its claim that history should work in the service of patriotism. Bennett's conservatism is evident in his praise for the free enterprise system and

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free trade, but he also puts in a good word for benevolent government. He deplores the vulgar rich, criticizes high tariffs and their lobbyists, and applauds Theodore Roosevelt's early 20th-century "trust-busting" of over-mighty corporations. Trade unions, the Roman Catholic Church, and common decency all enjoy his support, while on racial matters he's nearly as politically correct as Howard Zinn, author of the otherwise utterly different *People's History of the United States.* Zinn is a compassionate lefty. We will have to wait for volume two to confirm, as appears to be the case, that Bennett is staking out for himself the corresponding historical ground of compassionate conservatism. ♦

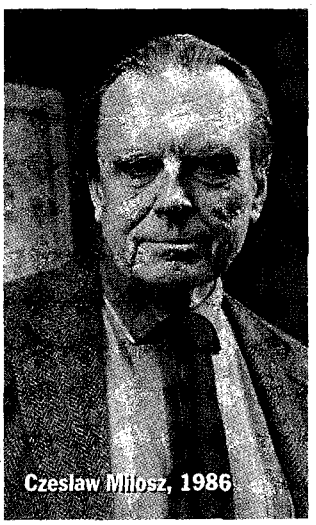
Time of Trial

Czeslaw Milosz's chronicle of chaos.

BY DANIEL SULLIVAN

"I have often thought," Czeslaw Milosz wrote to Jerzy Andrzejewski in 1942, "of writing a new 'confessions of a child of the age,' such as Musset wrote . . . that would exceed, in its violence and scream of pain, that Romantic era's settling of accounts of conscience."

If the essays and letters collected in this volume are those confessions, they reveal modern man's conscience to be nearly unaccountable. "What happened? How did we come to this? And what shall we do now?" Milosz asked these questions in the darkness of World War II Warsaw. In addressing them, *Legends of Modernity* gives us a startling memoir of the intellectual decay and chaos preceding and accompanying Europe's disastrous plunge into war. But perhaps more unsettling, it also provides a measure of how well the half-century after that cataclysm has addressed the same problems—how well we have since accounted for the conscience of modern man.



Corbis Sygma / Sophie Bassouls

Czeslaw Milosz, 1986

Legends of Modernity
Essays and Letters From Occupied Poland, 1942-43
by Czeslaw Milosz
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 266 pp., $25

Appearing for the first time in English, Milosz's wartime reflections startle the reader both by their desperate emotional intensity and their remarkable clear-headedness. The book is unabashedly intellectual in the continental tradition of Johan Huizinga or José Ortega y Gasset. Milosz does high cultural history here, emphasizing ideas and animating concepts instead of material conditions. At times he partakes of the vices of lesser thinkers; the book can be obscure (especially when discussing interwar Polish authors), convoluted, and confused. Milosz admits as much. But at their best, which is often, the essays evince a deep moral sense and a straightforward search for truth and the good, which is refreshing. That sense and that search are the criteria by which Milosz issues modernity its condemnation.

During the years (1942-43) that Milosz worked on these essays, he lived clandestinely in Warsaw and participated in the "cultural arm of the Polish anti-Nazi resistance." From hiding, he watched the self-immolation of European civilization. His intellectual reaction, recorded most vividly in the letters he exchanged with Andrzejewski, gives this book a compelling and tragic sensibility: He looked around at "the ruins of Europe, tangible ruins more in the spiritual than the physical sense," and wondered what good it would do to point out the evil that has "revealed itself in all its grandeur."

He described the time leading up to the war as one of "feverish and vain trying on of all the old costumes with which we tried to cover our pitiful nakedness. Socialism had turned wormy and fallen apart; the idea of democracy had perished; Catholicism had been transformed into a desiccated mummy, . . . philosophy was drowning in conventionalism and fictionalism, while Marxism 'of the general line' jeered mercilessly at the 'rotting' of Western Europe."

In the essay with the most personal resonance, "The Experience of War," Milosz cites Tolstoy's phrase describing Pierre Bezukhov's mental state during the French seizure of Moscow in *War and Peace*: "excitement bordering on madness." Clearly recalling his own experience in 1939, when he fled Poland for Vilnius and then Romania, he calls this mental state "a condition of intellectual disarmament, born from a feeling of intellectual defenselessness in relation to an inner compulsion (to go, to act, to fulfill commands, to be in a crowd, etc.)." Americans who were in downtown Manhattan on September 11, 2001, might be able to sympathize.

In some ways, *Legends of Modernity* is Milosz's attempt to rearm himself intellectually, to discern after the initial descent into madness what led man to his dementia. He soon recognized World War II as the logical endpoint, the pit into which modern man fell once he followed his ideas over the precipice of the 20th century. It was the

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development of modernity's ideas and concepts themselves—the "legends" of the title—that prepared the catastrophe. The first eight essays in *Legends of Modernity* dissect this development.

Two central concepts figure prominently throughout all of the legends: man as a natural animal, and the subjugation of truth to action. The first ultimately leads to the second, and both brought the West to 1939.

The pivotal first step, for Milosz, came when man began, after the Renaissance, to understand himself as a creature innately good in nature but whom civilization corrupted. Thus, he valued his own "natural" sense of goodness and truth over the traditions, history, and experience of civilization. Milosz then makes the point that the supposedly innate goodness that man found in himself suspiciously resembled (and of course really aped) the morality that civilization had taught him. But the damage was done: Once man saw his true goodness in his own nature, nature and not civilization became the criterion of morality.

The 19th century brought this development to its apotheosis, for nature revealed itself in man's eyes as an endless struggle for supremacy among species, a "nasty, brutish and short" battle of isolated beasts. Charles Darwin seemed to vindicate Thomas Hobbes: Civilization no longer corrupted nature, but merely clothed it. In the crowded cities of this world, isolated individuals unknown to each other competed in obscurity. Looking to nature, man saw not the benign innate goodness that Rousseau saw, but something amoral and violent. This became the nature that man mistook for the essence of human affairs.

According to Milosz, this set the stage for the second major development, the subjection of truth to action—and, ultimately, to power. Seeing in the natural world an amoral struggle, man identified the good with his own will, his own life energy. "*Pereat veritas, fiat vita*" ("let truth die, let life be"), cried Friedrich Nietzsche, coining the motto of the new world. Truth became just another myth, and so man equated what was true with what conduced best to action, with what widened his own realm of experience, without wondering what actions are right or experiences worth avoiding.

Demagogues turned this into a naked logic of power and preached whatever "truth" moved the people to action, whatever propaganda made them feel good and attracted them to the dictator. Once truth has no claim on man, Milosz insisted, man makes his own truth in accord with his basest impulses.

Of course, this is only the briefest outline, and the reader will discover much more in Milosz's account. But one hopes it indicates the degree to which Milosz's legends of modernity have persisted into our own time, for many are familiar. In the years since the mid-century's suicidal spasm of violence, of course, the West has recovered; but the reader of Milosz finds himself wondering, "How well?" This is a book about modernity's failure to recognize and condemn evil when it stares us in the face.

In 1942, Czeslaw Milosz wondered what intellectual soil remained for conscience after the poisonous intellectual seeds modernity had sown. The interwar years had offered only complacent, hollow humanitarianism and unconsidered, self-satisfied moralisms. These were no match for Hitler or Stalin. It is worth asking whether we have found any ideas more promising. How, intellectually, do we recognize the evils of our time? If we only have moral intuitions, independent of civilization, then we are back where Milosz started. ♦

Bad to Verse

You may be a poet, and might not know it.

BY AARON MACLEAN

Americans will remember Stephen Fry as Bertie Wooster's indispensable Jeeves in the BBC adaptations of P.G. Wodehouse. In Britain he is a personality, and occupies a firmly upper-middlebrow location on the country's bandwidth and presses. He is the host of *QI*, a sort of comedy quiz show for those whose brains are overfull and underemployed. In 2003, *Bright Young Things*, an adaptation of Waugh's *Vile Bodies* that Fry wrote and directed, was released. A radio program, *Stephen Fry's Incomplete & Utter History of Classical Music*, was adapted into a book in 2004. He has also written a few very funny novels (*The Liar* prominently among them) and a memoir, *Moab Is My Washpot*. Now he has written a book on poetry.

The Ode Less Travelled
Unlocking the Poet Within
by Stephen Fry
Hutchinson, 220 pp., $25

According to Fry, this latest effort began as the result of a friendly chat about the *villanelle*, "a pastoral Italian form from the sixteenth century written in six three-line stanzas" with a set system of repeating certain lines as refrains. (Don't you get your book ideas this way?) Fry was praising it to his companion as an example of "the extraordinary resilience and power of ancient forms" of verse. The companion (who remains unidentified) responded with ridicule, complaining that no one interested in poetry in our modern age should have to trouble himself with tired old media "dictated by some medieval Italian shepherd."

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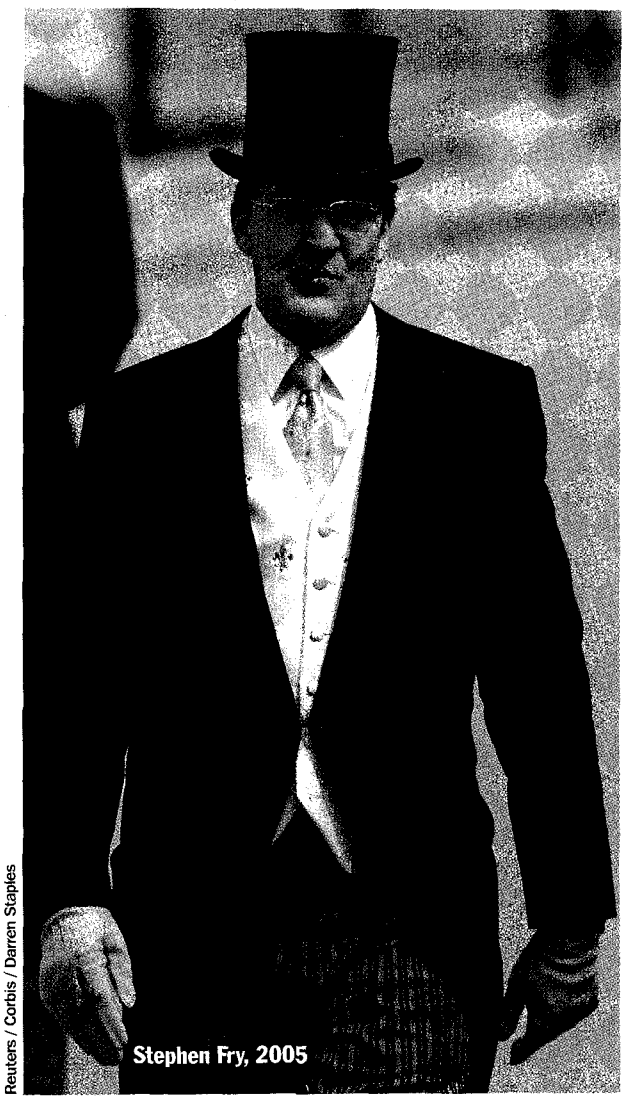
Fry, knowing his companion to be a fan of Dylan Thomas, set the trap: Inquiring "nonchalantly" into his friend's poetic tastes, he secured the innocent admission that "Do not go gentle into that good night" was a personal favorite. You do not need any education in medieval prosody to guess at what comes next: "Do not go gentle into that good night" is, in fact, a perfect *villanelle*. Its titular first line is the refrain that ends stanzas two and four, and the last line of the first stanza—"Rage, rage against the dying of the light"—ends stanzas three, five, and six.

That the story is vaguely preposterous, and saved by the wit of its telling, is characteristic both of a particularly English mode of discourse, and of Fry's own style. The reader might feel talked down to, but somehow the overall effect charms. The key tactic, of which Fry makes liberal use, is for the author to indicate to the reader that he knows that he is being precious. But Fry's obvious mastery of the subject matter, not to say his passion for it, is the main saving grace. This is a delightful and useful book for all of us who might remember snatches of what formal education we had in poetry, but wish we had paid better attention.

Fry perceives this particular condition to be widespread, and intimately tied to another: the willful modern rejection, by those who consider themselves versed, of the classical forms. As the case of Fry's unfortunate friend shows, it is a rejection frequently made in ignorance. Fry's cure is to hold his reader's hand through a compulsively readable and detailed account of meter, rhyme, form, modern diction, and poetics. The added twist, and a key distinguishing feature in a market with plenty of poetry-appreciation books already on the shelves, is Fry's conviction that one is best served not just by learning to "appreciate" poetry, but also by learning to write it one's self. Thus, after each lesson, the reader is presented with an exercise.

They begin with elementary assignments to write a few lines of doggerel in a given meter or rhyme scheme, and progress to assigning parodies ("imagine yourself a Victorian poet"), *villanelles*, and beyond. (Fry's own examples are good fun: "Collections of these odes, or RUBA'IYAT / Showed sultans where progressive thought was at; / Distributed by dissidents and wits, / Like early forms of Russian samizdat.")

If the sufficiently motivated reader works through every exercise, there is no promise that he will produce anything particularly magnificent (though there is no promise that he won't), but he is certain to gain a degree of competency with the English poetic tradition which will aid not only an effort to be the next Philip Larkin, but also the more modest goal of reading a poem with the technical appreciation that a poet brings. The only complaint I can make is that the exercises have an uncanny ability to bring you face to face with your own banality, so there is substantial incentive just to keep reading.


Stephen Fry, 2005

Reuters / Corbis / Darren Staples

All that Fry is doing, of course, is offering to serve as tutor in an education that any self-respecting school system would have already provided. While the reading, writing, and teaching of poetry are far from requiring any obituaries, there is no question that the days are long gone when a young lad, of a certain privileged social position, was taught in school not only to read Greek and Latin poetry, but also to write them as well, fluently, and as a precondition of college admission. This Greco-Latin foundation, combined with later attempts to restore Anglo-Saxon forms, and to import further international styles in translation, constituted English poetry.

It is still our common heritage, and in theory ought to be more widely available in a more egalitarian society. But with democratization, not only has access to education been widened, but what is being accessed has been narrowed.

Attempts to establish Fry's book as a school text would be, unfortunately, ill-advised, due to his tendency to tell jokes for grownups. ("Milton, like many 17th- and 18th-century exponents of iambic pentameter, seemed very reluctant to use feminine endings, going so far as to always mark 'heaven'

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as the monosyllabic 'heav'n' whenever it ended a line. Finding two hendecasyllables in a row in *Paradise Lost* is like looking for a condom machine in the Vatican.")

The average high school student, however, might identify with the exercise proposed on page 208: "Try a short dramatic monologue, à la Browning, in which a young man in police custody, clearly stoned off his head, tries to explain away the half-ounce of cannabis found on his person. Use the natural rhythms of speech, running-on through lines, pausing and running on again, but within rhymed iambic pentameter . . . "

But *The Ode Less Travelled* does serve as a welcome contribution in the oft-neglected field of the middlebrow, which was always designed for the edification of adults in a democratic society—a polity that, by its very nature, is always in danger of plunging to the lowest common cultural denominator.

It is another feature of Fry's Englishness that the class-clown act (not to mention the mock-serious packaging of the book) is meant to obscure his clear ability for serious criticism. Fry is a spirited and sensitive reader, with an infectious and knowledgeable admiration for the classics of the English tradition. His treatments of William Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins (readers of whom will be relieved to learn that no exercises are assigned in sprung rhythm), Thomas Hardy, John Betjeman, W.H. Auden, and more, would be worth reading just for themselves; and his polemical style, directed at the proponents of the more antinomian style of poetic education (which he suggests be named "prose-therapy," or "auto-omphaloscopy . . . —gazing at one's own navel") is balanced and bracing.

This is a modest work of literary criticism, and readers will be happy to discover Fry to be the sort of teacher who combines an old fashioned affection for tradition with an ability to inspire love for his subject by the fluency and depth of his own enthusiasm. Jeeves, we may presume, would not object. ♦

Eternal Verities

Making the case for classics.

BY JON STEFFEN BRUSS AND CHRISTOPHER MCDONOUGH

There are those who date the death of classics in America to a pleasant spring day in 1833, when President Andrew Jackson did not deliver the usual highly polished Latin oration at Harvard's degree ceremony, but instead rattled off the little Latin he knew: "*Ex post facto*; *e pluribus unum*; *sic semper tyrannis*; *quid pro quo*," he is supposed to have said, striking a blow for the common man and becoming *persona non grata* among the learned classes.

The Grammar of Our Civility
Classical Education in America
by Lee T. Pearcy
Baylor, 184 pp., $24.95

The story isn't true—he spoke briefly in English—but there is some truth in it all the same. By and large, Americans hate pomposity and prize practicality, and the image of Old Hickory cutting feckless Ivy League elitists down to size with a sneer accounts for the story's popularity.

There's more to it, though. While the Founding Fathers had been steeped in classical culture, and were deeply conversant with the thought and languages of ancient Greece and Rome, by the time Jackson came on the scene 50 years later, the nation was talking and acting in a radically different fashion. While the reverence for classical education would remain in place in the century to come, reverence is not the same thing as relevance. Looking to the ancient world, the new nation increasingly saw little with which to concern itself.

This story of America's disenchantment with the study of classics is the theme of Lee T. Pearcy's *The Grammar of Our Civility* and, as a story really about what Americans think of themselves, it is very compelling indeed. classics, as it had been studied from time immemorial in Europe, was always the elitist preserve of the self-defined ruling classes. There was no reason that Americans might not excel in such study but for the nagging suspicion that, since "all men are created equal," such elitism was somehow out of place in a democracy.

Nevertheless, in a republic whose monumental emblems include such neo-classical buildings as the Supreme Court, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Washington Monument—in which the architecture itself consciously binds the newest of republics, the United States, with the oldest, Rome, and overtly alludes to the classical Greek democratic ideals that underlie the American experiment—in this republic, Washington does indeed have something to do with Athens. In the "secret history" told by Pearcy, we read how our culture, like Andrew Jackson, has not just denied classics its place at the podium, but has even unceremoniously pushed it off the platform.

While not rushing to restore classics to its former position, the author of *The Grammar of Our Civility* argues that Latin and Greek should at least have a seat on the stage. But the "pragmatic classicism" that Pearcy envisions at the end of his book, while stirring, may ultimately be more closely connected with the problem than the cure. Pearcy's solution to the predicament of classics in America includes the development and implementation (albeit without

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specifics) of schools of "classical liberal education" at the primary and secondary levels akin to what is already widely practiced in the United States. Even if this recommended reform falls into the *nihil novum sub sole* category, it is welcome to see the idea in print.

More exciting yet is his suggestion of the creation of classical liberal arts schools in colleges and universities on the analogy of business and education "schools." As one among many options, these faculties would give takers, neophyte and veteran alike, a classical liberal arts education and culminate a seamless system from kindergarten to the senior year of college.

The problem comes before he makes the case for this newly formed American classicism, however. In a lengthy third chapter, Pearcy considers a number of counterarguments to the study of the "dead languages." To begin with, he argues, they are inextricably impractical and elitist, and so at odds with the fundamental spirit of American culture. Latin is, in this view, "a language whose historical users shaped it as an instrument of civic domination," and so of use only to an elite that no longer exists.

This perception of impractical elitism is something that all but the most oblivious American classicists feel at times. The intellectual self-discipline required for any amount of study in classics, especially in the doorkeeping courses of elementary Greek and Latin, is admittedly rigid. This is not a branch of study for those seeking easy validation of their intellectual abilities. Couple that with the lack of immediate applicability in meeting the needs of modern American economic and social life, and we see why classics seems more elitist than ever.

But is that perception accurate? Here Pearcy is too quick to concede the argument: Classical curricula—once, yes, the private domain of the cultural elite—are today widely available in all manner of institutions in a higher education system that boasts the widest accessibility in the world. And according to the College Board's online analysis of last year's SAT, Latin students scored far higher on the SATs than those studying any other language, averaging a score of 681 Verbal / 675 Math. That's better than the scores of those studying French (643V/639M), German (637V/652M), Hebrew (620V/646M), Spanish (573V/585M), and Chinese (546V/667M).

In fact, Latin students have been outstripping students of all other languages on the SATs since at least 1996, the College Board's oldest online record, and the trend probably extends much further back than that. But no matter. The conclusion to draw from the data is clear enough: If you want not just high *but the highest* scores on the SATs, start studying Latin as soon as possible. That's not elitism speaking; that's good old-fashioned pragmatism of the sort that, all pretensions aside, Americans looking to get ahead have always embraced.

Pearcy likewise allows the argument that, because, in our postmodern age "it is possible to live at last as an educated person without privileging Latin and Greek," the discipline is clearly on the verge of extinction. That may be so, but, while the bell has been tolling for classics since before the Middle Ages, oddly enough, obituaries on "the death of classics" have become something of a growth industry.

In 1998 Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath issued their impassioned *Who Killed Homer?*, which hurled accusations at professional classicists and their all-too-often leaden academic prose, and followed this up with 2001's *Bonfire of the Humanities*. That same year spawned Page duBois's *Trojan Horses: Saving the Classics from Conservatives*, a rejoinder to Hanson and Heath which nonetheless conceded the discipline's loss of vitality. More recently, Professor James O'Donnell, provost of Georgetown, delivered the 2004 presidential address to the national classics conference, the American Philological Association, and noted that "the old story [of classics] won't work any longer," although he conceded that it "will always deserve to be taught, even if it must then be untaught." It is interesting that, though O'Donnell had come to bury classics, he instead simply asked it to commit suttee.

But the most pernicious argument Pearcy entertains is in many ways the most fashionable. The real feather in the cap of the case against classics—that it teaches lies about the world—is so much a caricature of itself as to refuse being taken seriously.

"[The fictions of grammar] teach . . . an image of the world that cannot any longer be believed," he writes. If you haven't yet had the pleasure, journey with us for a moment to the postmodern world. Here, nothing is real, and every statement is a violent construct imposed on the Other by our willful ego. In this deconstructed realm, to say that Cicero was murdered in 43 B.C., or that the genitive singular of the Latin second declension always ends in *–i*, is not to speak truthfully, but to enter into the "fiction of grammar."

Or as Pearcy puts it: "Those who study Classics are led to believe in the reality of Socrates or Aeneas and in the truth or falsehood of statements about them. These beliefs are as harmful to us as the belief in the objective reality of our predications."

Funny thing is, you'll notice that doesn't change the fact that the sun always rises in the east, which means it's morning. And when the day is ended, all but the steepest skeptic must accept the truth of facts and their meanings merely for survival. Like it or not, had you been in Rome to see dawn and dusk on December 7, 43 B.C., you would have also witnessed the head and hands of Cicero mounted on the *rostra*—a signal, even if you weren't ready to accept it, that the Roman Republic had expired.

Unfortunately, Pearcy's concession to the postmodernists comes back to roost, and in a way that can only smother the brood. His concession saves the classics only by appeasing postmodernism, "reconstructing" classical education to make it about "negotiating the self against society." (A word to the uninitiated: That's Foucauldian for "rising above the externally imposed determiners of your materi-

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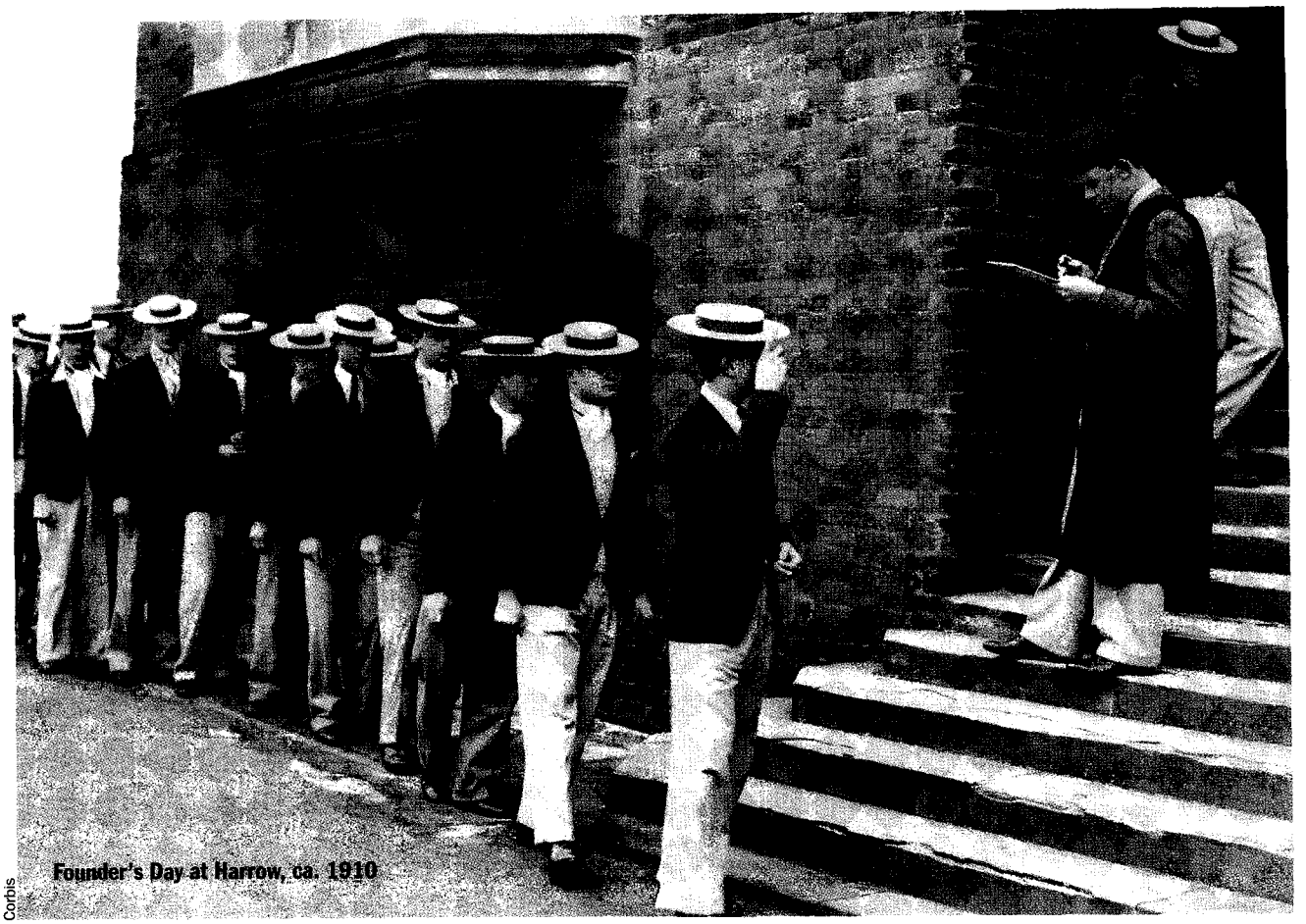

Founder's Day at Harrow, ca. 1910

Corbis

al circumstances.") If we've learned anything since the Renaissance, so Pearcy argues, it's that classics is less about the classics—the works of Homer, Virgil, and Ovid—than it is about what students, teachers, and scholars do with them as expressions of themselves.

The texts, artifacts, and monuments of ancient Greece and Rome thus become empty vessels. We lend them meaning, and in so doing, "negotiate" ourselves "against society." Ah, but there's more. So Pearcy: The "self" of classical-era humans and *littérateurs* "is indeterminate, unstable, and almost infinitely negotiable against multiple ideas of what is given by nature." Thus the new American classical education is not only justified in taking, but even required to take, the classical literary inheritance as a workshop in self-negotiation.

If texts are so devoid of meaning, how do we know whether authors were negotiating themselves against society? And aren't there better and more efficient ways to learn how to negotiate oneself against society than by reading classical literature? A four-year stint in a theory-driven literature department comes to mind. What, then, can possibly justify the continued use of rigorous grammatical training and the slow reading of classical texts?

It's not that there's no justification. It's just that using the lever Pearcy chooses to pull to reactivate classical education in America has its own perils. You'd think we'd be happy to have any suggestion to help classics thrive; but we are loath, in the words of Livy, to use "a medicine that is worse than the disease." In fact, classical education has its own internal *raison d'être*, and we're better off arguing for that than grasping at the straws of an ultimately nihilistic perspective whose collapse will bring down itself and all hitched to it.

Because it helps us know ourselves, our world, and our place in it more completely, a classical education never ceases to be relevant and can gain very different significance upon successive readings. But this does not mean that the text is an empty vessel *or* that the reading of texts is primarily about projecting ourselves on a blank movie screen. Sane critics have long known this. What makes a piece of literature a classic is its imperviousness to a finalizing interpretation.

Danielle Steel's novels are not classical literature precisely because their meaning is transparent and simplistic. Homer, conversely, lacks this transparency. He's not devoid of a message; it's just that one can read and reread Homer with successively more profound and different insights into the matters he raises. The *Iliad* cannot be reduced, as one flaccid student recently put it, to "Achilles is a big crybaby." Rather, tangled up in the beauty of Homer's language and the rawness of the struggle for life are the perennial questions of honor, rage, and the quest for a life that on death's cusp can be said to have been worth living.

In the end, the classical literary tradition amounts to more than a collection of mottoes for politicians to string together, or a *tabula rasa* against which postmodernists can negotiate themselves. Academic trends come and go, but somehow the classics endure. ♦

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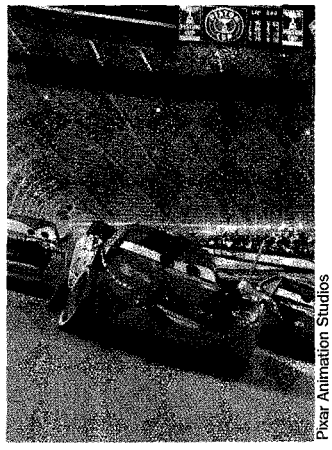
Fix This Flat

Animation is great, but don't forget plot and characters.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

"When a director dies," the pioneering cinematographer John Grierson once said, "he becomes a cinematographer."

He was referring to a problem that has afflicted film directors almost from the moment of the medium's birth. A director's job is, above all, to be the storyteller of a movie, to make the plot and characters come alive. But all too often, directors become obsessed with the technical aspects of moviemaking, especially with the look of the film. Grierson was saying that any director who is more interested in the composition of a frame of film than in the story has lost his way.



Pixar Animation Studios

Cars
Directed by John Lasseter

That's exactly the problem with *Cars*, the latest animated film released by Pixar. Its director is John Lasseter, the founder and chief executive of Pixar and the director of its first great movies, *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2*. The extraordinary thing about Lasseter's earlier work was the obsessive focus on storytelling and character development. Even though Pixar was bringing an innovative animation technique to full-bodied life in these films, Lasseter never called on his viewers to ooh and aah at the amazing look of the images emerging from his wondrous computers. What mattered—in Lasseter's two films and in the five amazing Pixar movies that followed them—was the tale itself, told with uncommon wit, speed, and emotional depth.

Cars is the first bad Pixar movie. And that's because it appears Lasseter fell in love with the way it looked and forgot that he needed to tell a story that would move people. The movie's cast of talking cars is awe-inspiring, as are the settings in which they move: Utah's Monument Valley and the NASCAR racetracks where the film begins and climaxes. The play of light and shadow, the subtle way in which the shiny race car gets more and more grimy as the movie goes on, and the evocation of a multivehicle crash are technically mind-boggling. But they aren't in the least interesting. And neither is *Cars*, because its characters are poorly conceived and its story is uninvolving.

The protagonist is a cocky race car named Lightning McQueen, who is trying to win the prestigious Piston Cup. He's selfish, thinks he knows everything, and is a snob. He needs to be taken down a few pegs, and that happens when he finds himself marooned in a small town called Radiator Springs. After a traffic accident, a crusty judge orders him to spend a week fixing the place up (a rather hackneyed plot device stolen shamelessly from the Michael J. Fox movie *Doc Hollywood*). And wouldn't you know it? He learns to love and care about people, especially a cute little Porsche.

In *Toy Story*, Lasseter lavished attention even on the most minor characters and managed to create indelible impressions in a short period of time: a neurotic dinosaur, an acerbic Mr. Potato Head, an obsequious slinky dog. In *Cars*, all we get are the most obvious clichés: a Hispanic lowrider, a redneck tow truck, a hippie Volkswagen van, a martial Jeep. Lasseter and his crew do nothing but present us with them. They presume we will love them. They are more interested in making sure that the dents on the tow truck are all in the right place.

And it's a great mystery why Lasseter would hang his entire tale on a character as unappealing as Lightning McQueen, who doesn't have a single endearing quality and then makes a sudden and weird transformation into a good guy, out of our view, during a sleepless night we don't get to watch.

Lasseter would have known in his earlier days that he needed to emphasize character and story above all else, just as he would have known that the movie could have been trimmed by 20 minutes with absolutely no difficulty whatsoever. And since he is the creative boss at Pixar—and now that Disney has acquired Pixar, of all Disney animation—nobody was able to set him straight.

It's possible that the tragic loss of his codirector, Joe Ranft, in a car crash last year robbed Lasseter of crucial creative advice he needed. It's also possible that he was distracted beyond salvation by the Disney-Pixar soap opera that took up so much space in the business sections of the newspaper over these past few years.

Whatever the reason, *Cars* is a minor fiasco. It has a satisfying final 15 minutes, but it's very hard to sit through the 91 that precede it. Lasseter couldn't, or wouldn't, get rid of anything pretty. It appears that, even in the world of computer animation, when no actual cinematography is taking place, it's still the case that when a director dies, he becomes a cinematographer. ♦

John Podhoretz, a columnist for the New York Post, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic, and the author, most recently, of* Can She Be Stopped?

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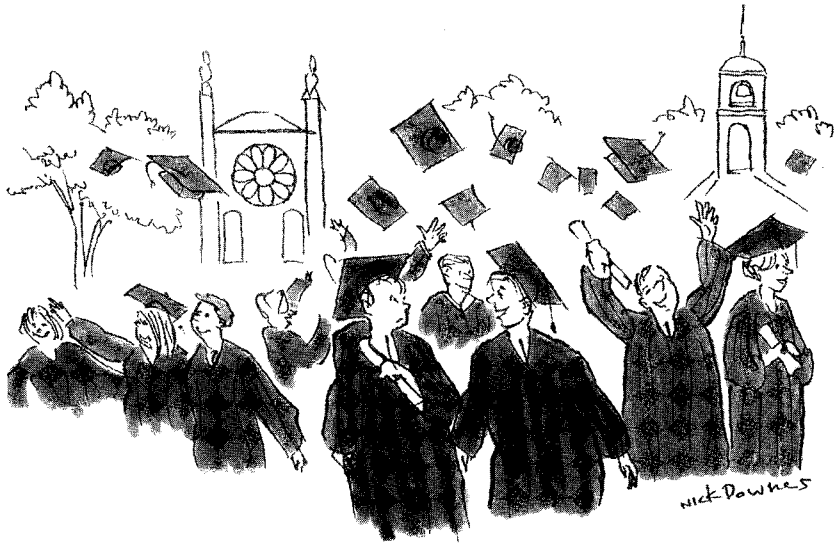

"I've already been offered a job at a supermarket, handing out pizza puffs on a toothpick."

Books in Brief

The Intellectuals and the Flag **by Todd Gitlin (Columbia University, 192 pp., $24.95).** Among Winston Churchill's aphorisms, his observation that "when the eagles are silent, the parrots begin to jabber" speaks profoundly to the current morass of bickering partisanship. No one understood better than Churchill that in the absence of innovative leadership, things begin to fall apart. Finding this exact sort of decay in the modern left, Todd Gitlin presents *The Intellectuals and the Flag* with the intent of silencing the parrots and finding new leftist eagles. Specifically, by revisiting the movement's past luminaries and intellectual schools, Gitlin is trying to lead the left away from certain "traditions that have flourished in recent decades," traditions which he sees as responsible for leading it "into a wilderness." The book is meant not to be a tome of self-flagellation, but rather a tempered plea to stop the insanity. Gitlin comes strikingly close to accomplishing his goal, and is only prevented from complete success by using the very type of rhetoric that he warns against when he indulges in an unproductive jeremiad at the conclusion of his book.

Although *The Intellectuals and the Flag* puts forth a well-reasoned argument for the left to reevaluate its philosophy, intellectuals on the right have previously made many of the same points. (One wonders that if it weren't for Gitlin's role as a friendly critic, would his work be treated as nothing more than a conservative attack?) Nonetheless, it is precisely this insider perspective that makes the book interesting and worth reading.

The major criticism of the left today is that while many can identify what it stands against, few can identify what it stands for. In Gitlin's words, the left is a movement that "has been clearer about isms to oppose—mainly imperialism and racism—than about values and policies to further." Drawing from his Trotskyite days, Dwight Macdonald used to call this *khotevism*, a term derived from the Russian word for tail that means "making up your policy in reaction to your enemy." This is not difficult to understand, considering that the New Left carved out an identity as a force of opposition, specifically to the Vietnam war; and in many ways, the left still encounters problems in trying to understand any military action outside of a Vietnam-type context.

Understandably, Gitlin sees a major problem with this sort of rhetoric. As an alternative, he wishes to revisit intellectuals like David Reisman, C. Wright Mills, and Irving Howe, who proposed ideas on their own without waiting for what the other guy was going to say. In the absence of such figures and the subsequent retreat of likeminded intellectuals to the ivory tower, the left has been stuck with the jabbering of postmodernism—something that Gitlin sees as contributing to its current atrophy. If the left has any hope of regaining legitimacy, it will "have to decide not to coast down the currents of least resistance" and return to public life. In Gitlin's world, working for change goes well beyond academia.

While most of the book is a judicious and thoughtful account of the modern left's genesis, the following sentence refers to President Bush: "First, almost half of American voters chose this lazy ne'er do well, this duty-shirking know-nothing who deceived and hustled his way to power largely without careful scrutiny." It is not Gitlin's willingness to criticize Bush that is troublesome, but rather that his criticism seems to be little more than puerile name-calling and not the sort of reasoned polemic one would expect to conclude the book. It is unfortunate, because in his moderation and honesty Gitlin reveals himself to be precisely the type of voice needed by the left.

—Nicholas J. Xenakis

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Parody

The head of the Library of Congress [has named] Donald Hall . . . as the 14th poet laureate. Mr. Hall, a poet in the distinctive American tradition of Robert Frost, has also been a harsh critic of the religious right's influence on government arts policy. And as a member of the advisory council of the National Endowment for the Arts during the administration of George H.W. Bush, he referred to those he thought were interfering with arts grants as "bullies and art bashers."

—New York Times, *June 14*

Pontiac, its engine stalled
rutted road, where once my
d I had raced till dawn,
y, dead, devoid of acid
our automobile, stalled,
per cables, each attached,
ve, one positive, the juice
igh the engine block
he battery with life
he umbilical chord.
s pistons hacked and spit
ntial wailed and wheezed
ise splashed in oily joy
engine humming soon
would hum of yore
was soon refreshed anew
eer, and not to yield.

Apocalypse NEA

They are not there that should be here
The checks, the greenback chariots,
Speeding from Endowment's womb
To vessels filled with urine or
Ofili's Christ now dung-encrusted.
Never again! will Mapplethorpe's
Entwined men perspire on the
Rough-hewn sheets of flowerbeds
And taunt the prosecutor's brief.
Finley's chocolate-flavored breasts
Await the butterscotch in vain.
The chill descends.
Bashers of art who, smug in pews,
Enraged behind the taxpayer's mask
Slay the grants and strangle she
Who might have drawn an end to war,
Or reconciled white and black,
Are bullies who must answer for
The loss of masterworks unknown:
An AIDS ballet, a song for peace,
A bas-relief of Rosa Parks,
A naked garden gnome, perhaps,
Or shuttered galleries, dark and cold.

the weekly Standard
June 26, 2006

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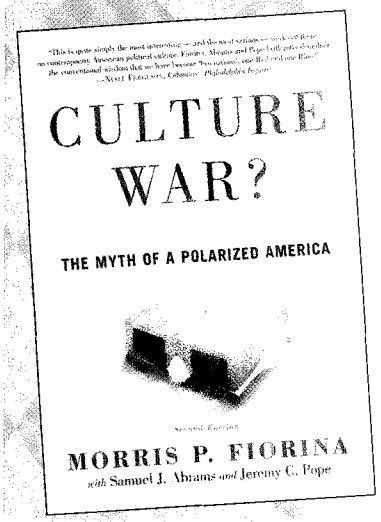
Critical Readings from Hoover Institution Fellows



Culture War?

The Myth of a Polarized America

MORRIS P. FIORINA, WITH SAMUEL J. ABRAMS AND JEREMY C. POPE

"This is quite simply the most interesting—and the most serious—work out there on contemporary American political culture. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope brilliantly demolish the conventional wisdom that we have become two nations, one Red and one Blue."

— Niall Ferguson, Laurence A. Tisch Professor of History, Harvard University

Is the nation really polarized on hot-button moral, religious, and cultural issues? Should we believe the media pundits and politicians who tell us that Americans are deeply divided?

No, says Morris Fiorina. At a time when the rift between the "red" and "blue" states can seem deeper than ever, Fiorina debunks the assumption that Americans are deeply split over national issues. He presents quite a contrary picture—that most Americans stand in the middle of the political landscape and are in general agreement on those issues thought to be most divisive. By recognizing our common ground, we have a basis for creating a more unified and moderate approach to government and politics in the near future.

Morris P. Fiorina is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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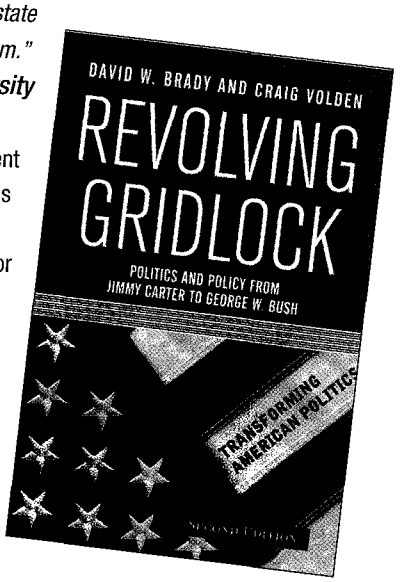
Revolving Gridlock

Politics and Policy from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush

DAVID W. BRADY AND CRAIG VOLDEN

"A skillful blend of theory and evidence. Essential to understanding the current state of legislative politics and interbranch relations in our separation of powers system."

— David Epstein, Columbia University



Despite the early prospects for bipartisan unity on terrorism initiatives, government gridlock continues on most major issues in the wake of the 2004 elections. In this fully revised edition, political scientists David W. Brady and Craig Volden demonstrate that gridlock is not a product of divided government, party politics, or any of the usual scapegoats. It is, instead, an instrumental part of American government—built into our institutions and sustained by leaders acting rationally not only to achieve set goals but to thwart foolish inadvertencies.

David Brady is deputy director and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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